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PARENT ENGAGEMENT PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE IN NEW PRESERVICE
TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Education
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Education

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Abstract

Parent engagement that focuses on building relationships and increasing social capital has a positive impact on student outcomes. However, one of the greatest challenges new teachers face is working with parents in support of children's learning. The need to better prepare teachers points to an enhanced curriculum of parent engagement during preservice teacher education.

Ontario faculties of education were surveyed regarding planned implementation of new accreditation guidelines for parent engagement. Document reviews of existing and modified teacher education programs were conducted. Participants reported parent engagement pedagogy in modified programs had somewhat increased and believed teacher candidates would be 'somewhat' to 'quite a bit' better prepared to engage parents. Document reviews found limited practical opportunities, integration, and consistency in exposure to parent engagement pedagogy.

Implications for faculties of education include facilitating preservice teacher candidates' capacity for relationship building, increasing social capital through greater home-school-community partnerships, and greater practical opportunities. Ontario faculties of education should continue to grow the strength of preservice teacher education programs with evidence-based research on effective parent engagement pedagogy and practice that challenges traditional perspectives, and that better aligns teacher competencies and expectations in fulfillment of parent engagement related policy.

Keywords: building relationships; home-school-community partnerships; parent engagement; parent involvement; preservice teacher education programs; social capital

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Preface

Parent engagement matters. I had heard these words before, many times. But I did not truly understand their meaning until I found myself having to act as an advocate for primary education. I had learned that only two out of six public elementary schools offered full-day kindergarten programs. One school offered a French Immersion kindergarten program with a very long waiting list, and to attend the other school, many parents would have had to complete an application to cross border their children. Essentially, at the time, there was only one option for parents and families wanting a full-day English stream kindergarten program for their children.

It is difficult learning to navigate the education system. The sheer volume of policies and regulations, written in a language that is challenging to understand, makes the task of learning where to find help and accurate information very overwhelming. I listened to many parents who felt voiceless. I too often heard both parents' and teachers' misperceptions of the pervasive 'us' versus 'them' mentality in public education.

Subsequently, many barriers and stereotypes were encountered, including those I brought to the table myself. Yet, I connected. And when I did, it strengthened my belief that it is possible for both parents and teachers to be valued and respected partners in education. These connections and relationships grew as did my passion for helping parents and families support their child's learning, fostering parent-teacher relationships and advocating for greater parent engagement.

Around 2004, I began helping parents and families navigate the education system by providing assistance, connections, and access to resources, tools and information. Over the years, I collaborated with and learned from many wonderful parents, families, teachers and educators at the school, regional, board and Provincial levels. I served as Chair of Hamlet Public School

Council, Co-Chair of Stratford Regional School Council (SRSC) and Chair of the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) Parent Involvement Committee (PIC). I was involved in many parent engagement initiatives including, WeTube: An Interactive Evening for Parents, The Parent Voice Website, several Parent Reaching Out (PRO) Grants, and an Ignite Parents event in May 2012. I have been a guest speaker at the Ministry of Education's annual PIC Symposium in April 2011, the Regional Superintendents of Curriculum Conference in January 2012, People for Education's network meeting, Connecting Parent and Community Networks with Twitter, in March 2012, and a guest webinar speaker on the Parents as Partners website, episode 53, in October 2012.

I have also had the opportunity to collaborate with People for Education and the Ministry of Education on several publications including, *Beyond Fundraising: The 2011 Report on Ontario's School Councils*, *Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools* (2010), and a *Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School* (2010). On behalf of Avon Maitland District School Board's PIC, I had the privilege of maintaining two websites, one being a weekly blog, and two twitter accounts in an effort to promote awareness, accessibility, greater communication and establish a collaborative learning network with parents and educators.

I was thrilled to have won Wilfrid Laurier University's inaugural Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition in March 2013, about greater parent-teacher collaboration in education. I was deeply honoured to be the recipient of the Avon Maitland District School Board's 2013 Always Learning Awards in April 2013, in addition to being a recipient of Hamlet Public School's 2012-2013 Volunteer of the Year Award in June 2013.

I use my own experiences and the work of Professor Debbie Pushor (2007; 2012; 2013), Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) and others as a lens to view parent engagement and to situate myself within the context of my research. I believe and define parent engagement as the process of relationship building, based upon reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust that facilitates greater parent-teacher collaboration in support of student success. I embrace the core belief that both parents and teachers genuinely want to support students so that they may succeed in school and achieve their potential. I believe all parents want the best for their children and that all parents have the capacity to support their children's learning.

In education, change does not happen in isolation. Change begins with relationships. At the very heart of parent engagement, you will find relationships and the promising possibility to realize a school culture that welcomes parents and families as valued partners and respected voices in their children's education. What I hope for in our public education system in Ontario, is an enriching education experience for all students, parents, families, teachers, schools, and communities. I hope for a strong foundation of relationships, collaboration and partnerships in education that nurtures a love of learning in children, to last a lifetime. Because I believe so passionately that we are all learners with a shared goal...our children's education.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Every year a parent and teacher share a child (Pushor, 2013) and it follows that throughout their teaching careers, teachers will encounter many students from globally diverse cultures, socioeconomic status, and backgrounds. Thus, it is fundamental for teachers to be able to effectively work with their students' parents in efforts to support student success and overall well-being. As defined by Pushor (2012) and for the purposes of this research, the term parent signifies the individual(s) who have more responsibility than others for the primary care and well-being of a child, regardless of their biological or non-biological relationship to the child. Parent engagement pedagogy refers to the teaching and learning of parent engagement. It broadly encompasses all theory, research, knowledge and instruction relating to parent engagement.

While recognizing the role that other family members can play in student success, the focus of this research is on parent engagement. Pushor (2007) defines parent engagement as, “enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers’ knowledge” (p. 3). Pushor’s (2007) notion of engagement as a process defines my conceptualization of parent engagement throughout this research. Parent engagement is the process of relationship building, based upon reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust that facilitates greater parent-teacher collaboration in support of student success.

Parent engagement embraces the core beliefs that all parents want the best for their children and that all parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Both teachers and parents want to support students and they want them to succeed in school. When teachers join their knowledge together with the

knowledge that parents have, they often share the same concerns and want the same things for their students (Henderson et al., 2007). Thus, when teachers reach out to parents with the goal of building collaborative relationships based upon mutual respect and a common purpose, student success, parents will respond positively (Henderson et al., 2007).

Effective parent engagement depends upon a teacher's capacity to engage parents in support of children's learning. One of the most important skills to have to engage parents effectively is strong communication skills. Teachers are expected to know how to communicate with all parents in positive ways, for example, that demonstrate they value parental input in their child's learning, and in ways that help build mutual respect and collaborative relationships to support student learning (Epstein, 2013).

Examples of effective parent engagement include creating a welcoming environment by inviting students and parents to a meet-and-greet celebration or classroom tour prior to the start of the school year. It includes inviting and listening to parents share their knowledge about their child and their educational goals, and blending that knowledge with teacher expertise to find collaborative ways parents and teachers can work together to support student learning (Henderson et al., 2007). Effective parent engagement includes teachers developing relationships with their student's parents by creating frequent opportunities to meet face-to-face, beyond compulsory once-a-year parent-teacher interviews. It also includes teachers providing timely and ongoing feedback to parents about their child's learning, and showing them how they can support their child's learning at home with resources and strategies that are directly linked to classroom learning (Henderson et al., 2007). Drawing upon the extensive research by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), Table 1 provides additional examples of what effective parent engagement practices might look like for teachers.

Table 1

Examples of Effective Parent Engagement for Teachers (Henderson et al., 2007)

Creating a Welcoming Climate	Developing Relationships	Linking to Learning
Teachers introduce themselves and meet with their students and parents prior to the start of the school year; parents are invited to complete a school or classroom climate survey; follow up on results	Teachers meet face-to-face with parents in addition to regular school events via student portfolio exhibitions, breakfast socials, etc.; barriers are addressed that might preclude meeting parents	Parents invited to attend workshops, events, programs offered throughout the year that focus on, for example, literacy, numeracy and student success
Classroom welcome signs, report cards, newsletters, etc., translated into parents' major languages; upcoming parent/family related events are posted; past events are displayed with pictures	Teachers provide timely, ongoing updates about student learning; teachers explain assessment tools; teachers encourage parents to discuss education at home and to set high standards, such as college	Student work prominently displayed and shared; parents see and receive updates on what children are learning in class; explanations of assessments, such as rubrics, are provided
Classroom is open and accessible to parents; classroom volunteer opportunities are available; teachers and all school staff are friendly; interpreters are available for school events and activities	Parents are encouraged to contact teachers anytime with questions or concerns; teachers are available via several means, such as phone or email; teachers ask parents how they prefer to be contacted	Parents asked how they would like to be involved; they receive information, support, materials on how they can contribute at school and at home; at home learning kits, tips/resources and strategies linked to classroom learning
Designated parent/family resource centre (in the school) where parents comfortably meet, share, borrow materials; school has a dedicated parent/family liaison or team committed to parent outreach and engagement	Teachers listen to parents share knowledge about their child; teachers blend this knowledge with their own to find common goals and ways parents and teachers can work together at home and at school for student success	Students are present at parent-teacher interviews to share and celebrate their work; student-led conferences are encouraged; parents and students are included in decision-making about learning
Students' countries of origin and culture are incorporated into geography lessons, readings, assignments, artwork, etc.; student work prominently displayed	Teachers facilitate two-way communication via phone, texts, email, websites, social media, etc.; opportunities for parents to provide input and feedback readily available	Parents are asked for the help they would like to better support their child; teachers build parents' confidence in their ability to support their child's learning

As illustrated in Table 1, parent engagement requires strong communication skills and the ongoing practice of a variety of outreach strategies and techniques. Unfortunately, teachers often do not get practical opportunities to work with or engage parents in supporting children's learning until after they enter the field (Lopez & Patton, 2013). The selection of professional development or other inservice training opportunities specific to parent engagement is often limited, or non-existent, and can be subject to availability across varying school districts (Lopez & Patton, 2013; Power, 2013). Professional development and training is also largely dependent upon funding, with the biggest expense being substitute or occasional teacher release time (Power, 2013). Thus, working with parents may be a challenge given that teachers may not be receiving adequate time and practice to hone their skills and develop the self-confidence they need to effectively work with parents to support student learning.

In conjunction with educational policy that speaks to the importance of engaging parents, to be described shortly, there is a wealth of evidence-based research that acknowledges and recognizes the vital role parents play in children's learning. But with limited training and opportunities to develop the skills necessary to effectively work with and engage parents, teachers are often responsible for developing their own learning and practice on their own time (Lopez & Patton, 2013). Consequently, learning about the importance of building relationships with parents to support student learning should begin during preservice teacher education.

Beginning teachers

The beginning of a new teaching career can be both an exciting and challenging time. Undeniably, no teacher is at the height of their teaching effectiveness straight out of their preservice teacher education (Myers, 2013). Like many professions, effective teaching requires

not only a solid pedagogical foundation, but also ample opportunities to practice and develop competency and skills.

One of the greatest challenges new teachers face and the task they feel least prepared to take on during their first teaching position, is engaging and working with parents in supporting their children's learning (Evans, 2013; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005; Ontario College of Teachers, 2011; Patte, 2011). According to research from the United States, while eight in ten new teachers strongly agree that effective teachers need to be able to work well with students' parents, 31% believe this to be their greatest challenge (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005). New secondary school teachers are more likely than new elementary school teachers to feel the least prepared to engage parents (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005). In addition, one in five new teachers found their relationship with parents of students at their school to be somewhat or very unsatisfying (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005).

Too often, teachers work in isolation without the support they need, causing them to feel ill-prepared and ill-equipped to handle challenges (Black, 2004). Beginning teachers who feel ill-prepared to work with parents frequently express hesitation and trepidation when discussing the relationships they expect to develop with their students' parents (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Additionally, new teachers may feel frustrated, demonstrate negative attitudes toward parents, and develop anxiety about the prospect of working with their students' parents (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). This is reflected in the high attrition rate for new teachers, sitting at almost 50% after five years when they experience a lack of support, feel disempowered, and are stressed (Power, 2013).

Not surprisingly, new teacher support programs often fall short of providing the necessary mentorship required for new teachers to gain competence, hone skills and gradually progress from novices to more experienced teachers (Black, 2004). For example, the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) in Ontario provides comprehensive support to 90% of public school first year teachers who report that they are in a regular teaching position (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012). Only one in three first year teachers in long-term occasional positions report being in the NTIP (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012). New teachers who are employed part-time or those on supply teaching lists are not eligible for the NTIP. Thus, because of their contract status, many new teachers do not benefit from the NTIP.

First year teachers in regular teaching positions report that they receive the least amount of assistance from their mentors and other experienced teachers on effective parent communication (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). Overall, one in ten first year teachers in regular teaching positions reported the assistance they received was somewhat unhelpful or not at all helpful (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). These results are consistent with American research findings that found 16% of new teachers assigned to mentors found their mentor to be not too helpful or not at all helpful (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005).

Current Provincial Policies that Speak to Parent Engagement

In Ontario, the responsibility for public education is shared between the provincial government and local school boards (People for Education, 2014). Like other provinces, Ontario has its own Education Act (Ontario, 2014) that governs school policy, operations, and establishes the duties and responsibilities of stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students and parents. Generally, The Ontario Ministry of Education oversees school board policy, curriculum and funding. The 72 district school boards across the province are in turn responsible for the

allocation of funding, school programming that meets provincial curriculum standards, and for implementing policies that apply to their local schools (People for Education, 2014).

One of the earlier policies to acknowledge the important role parents play in their children's education was Ontario Regulation 612/00 and the establishment of school councils in 1996 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002). Subsequent regulations were released in 2000 in response to efforts to make school councils more effective and consistent across the province. These new regulations confirmed the advisory role of school councils and clearly outlined the purpose and duties of school councils and principals (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002).

Comprised of a majority of parents, the principal, vice-principal or delegate, and various other members, the role of a school council is to consult with parents of students enrolled in the school about matters before the council (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002). Its primary purpose is to improve student achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents. A school council is accountable to the school community it represents and is the vehicle through which parents can express opinions and make recommendations to principals and school boards on matters relating to student learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002).

While school councils are the advisory body at the school level, the introduction of parent involvement committees (PICs) in 2010 represented the province's initiative to provide greater parental input at the board level. Also governed by Ontario Regulation 612/00, the primary purpose of PICs is to support, encourage, and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement and well-being (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). Led by parents, PICs support student achievement and well-being by providing information on parent engagement to board members and trustees, and through the active support of school councils and parents within their board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Both school councils and PICs are volunteer-based structures designed to provide parents with a voice at the school and board level, thus ensuring, “full access to the education system and meaningful representation as valued educational partners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 17). Parent-led groups, like school councils and PICs, have become the most frequently cited examples of involving parents at the local and board level, and a measure of the province’s success in creating greater opportunities for parents to voice their opinions regarding educational matters (Moss, 2001; Kozak, 2009). However, it is important to note that participation is voluntary and as members of a school council or PIC, parents serve only in an advisory role in educational policy development and decision-making. Administrators ultimately retain the authority and accountability for all decisions made in fulfillment of the requirements mandated by the Ministry of Education.

In addition to school councils and PICs, there are several policies implemented by school boards and local schools across the province that acknowledge and recognize the vital role parents play in education. These include, for example, policies relating to special education, French language schools, and First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education. Policies relating to special education were formally introduced into the Ontario Education Act in 1980. Today, there are a number of regulations pertaining to the spectrum of special education, but all special education legislation recognizes that parents are, “active participants in decisions related to the program and service provisions for their children” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6). This policy stipulates that each school board within the province have an established Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) that emphasizes collaborative partnerships with parents and focuses on effectively engaging all individuals participating in the span of the student’s development.

Ontario's policy for French-language schools is founded on authentic partnerships between parents, the school, and the community. This policy directly invites parents to share their experiences, contribute to discussions, and be an active part in all school decision-making (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). The Aménagement Linguistique Policy (2004) is explicit in its expectations for principals, teachers and staff to engage parents in their child's learning. The policy speaks directly to parents, affirming that:

The school acknowledges, respects, and values the central role that you play in the education of young people. No one is in a better position than you to tell the school about your concerns with respect to the education of your child and to help the school meet his or her needs. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 24)

In other words, Ontario's French-language schools policy recognizes parent knowledge as a valued and integral part of a school's efforts to best support student success.

The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007) is guided by four principles: excellence and accountability; equity and respect for diversity; inclusiveness, cooperation, and shared responsibility; and, respect for constitutional and treaty rights. Through cooperation and partnerships with all stakeholders in education, this policy directs school boards and schools to "develop creative strategies to encourage more First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents to participate more actively and directly in the education of their children" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 20). There is great emphasis throughout the policy on the shared responsibility of all educators, parents, families, Elders, community resources and organizations working together to support the academic success of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students.

In line with the equity, diversity, and inclusive principles of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy, Ontario introduced its new strategy for equity and inclusive education in

2009. This strategy envisions an education system where all students, parents, families, and the community are welcomed and respected (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Parent engagement is an essential component of this policy. School boards and schools are directed to actively promote the involvement and engagement of parents. Educators are to develop and implement strategies that encourage parents to share their ideas, provide advice, and participate, “in the review, development, and implementation of initiatives to support equity and inclusive education” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 22).

Building upon the success of its equity and inclusive policy, the Ministry of Education introduced Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, which was subsequently passed into law in 2012. This new law makes it clear that inappropriate behaviours, such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination, are unacceptable in schools. It also recognizes that all stakeholders in education play a significant role in promoting positive school climates. Effective communication and ongoing dialogue between educators, parents, families, and students is paramount to creating and sustaining a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a).

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF; Leithwood, 2012) recognizes the importance of engaging all stakeholders in support of student learning. At the public school level, effective leadership practices span five domains: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, improving the instructional program, and securing accountability (Leithwood, 2012). Parent engagement is deeply embedded within the framework. The language itself is rich and engaging. Words such as collaboration, diversity, meaningful interactions, relationships, trust, welcoming environment, valued partners, demonstrating respect, being open, encouraging, connecting, and facilitating, all describe

effective practices for schools to enhance their communication strategies, build relationships and engage all stakeholders (Leithwood, 2012).

With many diverse provincial policies speaking to the importance of engaging parents in their child's education, the Ministry of Education set out to develop a comprehensive framework focused on increasing parent engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b). In 2010, the province introduced *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*. This policy represents the collective consensus of a substantial amount of evidence-based research and policy that cites the importance of parents as valued partners in education. It emphasizes the investment in collaborative partnerships between students, parents, administrators, teachers, staff, government and the community in fulfilling, "the government's commitment to support and enhance parent engagement in Ontario" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 6).

Ontario's parent engagement policy identifies four key strategies for success in fulfilling its vision of parent engagement. They are:

- Strategy 1: School Climate – Foster and sustain a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parent perspectives are encouraged, valued and heard.
- Strategy 2: Eliminating Barriers – Identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning and to reflect the diversity of our students and communities.
- Strategy 3: Supports for Parents – Provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to support student learning at home and at school.
- Strategy 4: Parent Outreach – Review and expand communication and outreach strategies such as local workshops, presentations, tools, and resources, to share

information and strategies related to supporting learning at home and parent engagement in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b).

All provincial policies that speak to engaging parents, as discussed above, are cited in support of each of the four strategies. For example, Ontario's Leadership Framework supports strategy one on school climate, Ontario's First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy is cited in support of strategy two on eliminating barriers, and the Aménagement Linguistique Policy for French language schools is mentioned in support of strategy four on parent outreach. In other words, all existing extant policy that speaks to engaging parents is firmly grounded within the greater framework of the province's Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools (2010b).

The Ontario parent engagement policy claims to provide "a framework that will empower all educational partners and enable them to take concrete actions to support and encourage parent engagement so that our students can reach their full potential" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p. 13). However, the strategies, actions and recommendations made to better realize the policy's vision of parents as partners are specifically aimed at schools, school boards and the Ministry of Education. Although the policy stresses the collective commitment, effort, support and partnership of the entire education community, there is little mention of the critical role teachers and principals play in achieving the policy's expectations. There is even less mention of the training and support required for teachers and administration, as identified next, in fulfillment of expectations within the parent engagement framework.

Preservice Teacher Education

Faculties of education, as members of the education community, arguably play a limited or unknown role in fulfilling Ontario's vision of parent engagement. Within Ontario's parent

engagement policy, the only recommendation made for faculties of education is that they can help support the policy by developing teachers' "ability to engage in productive parent-teacher conversations" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.18). An example of what productive parent-teacher conversations might encompass is illustrated in Table 1. Meanwhile, *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools* (2010b) explicitly encourages schools, including teachers, to commit to the following four strategies:

1. Foster and sustain a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parent perspectives are encouraged, valued, and heard;
2. Identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning and to reflect the diversity of our students and communities;
3. Provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to support student learning at home and at school; and,
4. Review and expand communication and outreach strategies such as local workshops, presentations, tools, and resources, to share information and strategies related to supporting learning at home and parent engagement in schools.

These expectations exceed the lone recommendation for faculties of education to facilitate teacher candidates' conversation skills with parents. Specific recommendations on effective parent engagement pedagogy and practice in preservice teacher education programs are not clearly defined by Ontario's parent engagement policy. The policy claims to fulfill Ontario's vision of parent engagement - a vision that requires commitment and action from all members of the education community at all levels of the system - by identifying the roles of all education

partners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b). However, the role of faculties of education in preparing new teachers for parent engagement remains unclear.

In conjunction with the many teacher expectations for parent engagement as outlined in Special Education policy, French-language policy, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education policy, Equity and Inclusive policy, and the Accepting Schools Act, it appears that current provincial policy has inadequately defined the role of faculties of education in preparing new teachers. That is, current provincial policy provides limited guidance in identifying the role of faculties of education in support of parent engagement policy.

There appears to be a gap between Ontario policy expectations and the training teacher candidates receive as evidenced by the limited time committed to parent engagement pedagogy and practice in teacher education programs (Evans, 2012; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Kozak, 2009; Patte, 2011; Pushor, 2007; Pushor, 2012). As highlighted by Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004), “there seems to be a gap between our beliefs and our practice as teacher educators” (p. 57). This has resulted in, as previously highlighted by American and Canadian research, over one-third of new teachers feeling ill-prepared to work with parents, mentorship programs that provide little support for effective parent communication, and an attrition rate of almost 50% after five years (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005; Black, 2004; Power, 2013; Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). As Uludag (2006) states, “the failure to address parental involvement in both university and professional development contexts sends the message that it is unimportant” (p. 809).

Yet, parent engagement is acknowledged and recognized within extant provincial policy and research as vital to student and school success. That is, undeniably, schools cannot function in isolation from parents in their ongoing efforts to best support student learning so that all

students may achieve their potential. The question then is, how can we better prepare teachers for parent engagement?

Rationale for Research

Research reveals a need to better prepare new teachers to effectively work with their students' parents (Evans, 2013; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Lopez & Patton, 2013; Patte, 2011; Patton & Wanless, 2013; Uludag, 2008). Parent engagement, as an add-on or afterthought when school funds, climate or leadership in support of engagement might be low, is particularly challenging for new teachers. In relying upon inservice training and new teacher mentoring programs such as the NTIP, research shows that there are significant gaps in providing teachers with the adequate training and support they need (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005; Ontario College of Teachers, 2011; Black, 2004). The capacity to effectively communicate with and engage parents in their children's learning continues to significantly challenge new teachers and remains one of the biggest challenges new teachers face when entering the field.

This garners support for the idea that preservice teacher education programs may be a viable choice in preparing teachers to effectively work with parents towards improved student outcomes. Incorporating effective parent engagement pedagogy and practice into preservice teacher education would help give teacher candidates adequate opportunity to develop the skills and competence they need before entering the field.

In addition, a curriculum of parent engagement would help address teacher candidates' attitudes and beliefs about working with parents, a key recommendation identified by Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004). In a study of teacher candidate beliefs, Baum and McMurray – Schwarz (2004) found that teacher candidates were concerned about the future quality of their relationships with parents. Teacher candidates anticipated that their relationships with parents

would be characterized by conflict and criticism (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Many teacher candidates expressed an “us versus them” perspective towards working with parents and felt they would have to try to educate students in spite of their parents, rather than in partnership with them (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Thus, another important reason that garners support for greater integration of parent engagement pedagogy into preservice teacher education is to help teacher candidates develop appropriate beliefs and attitudes toward their future work with parents (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004).

Given the positive effects of parent engagement on student and school outcomes, it may be advantageous to demonstrate the importance of parent engagement from the beginning of preservice teacher education programs (Caspé, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011). Preservice teacher education programs should facilitate the development of skills, understanding, and the competence needed to effectively work with parents, a skill 80% of new American teachers strongly agree is important (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005). As Caspé et al. (2011) state, “when preservice teachers have the opportunity to see how effective teachers value and engage with families, they develop a stronger understanding of how to approach family engagement in their own educational practice” (p. 12).

This challenge can potentially be addressed at the preservice teacher education level with an enhanced curriculum that provides greater learning opportunities to practice and develop teacher candidates’ knowledge, confidence, self-efficacy and capacity to engage parents in their children’s learning. Consequently, effective parent engagement practices should start early in preservice teacher education programs. When it comes to teacher expectations for effective parent engagement, there needs to be greater investment in teacher preparation. Efforts to address parent engagement strategies and practices may have a positive impact on new teachers’

knowledge and self-efficacy to engage parents in their children's learning and may potentially increase their capacity to build collaborative relationships with their students' parents.

There are a few relevant studies that focus on preservice teacher education programs as a means to better prepare teacher candidates to engage parents, and the results are promising. These emerging programs emphasize greater quality, experiential context, and reflective practice in preservice teacher education (Myers, 2013). Ottawa University partnered with the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC) between 2007 and 2009 in a family and parent involvement curriculum enhancement initiative for teacher candidates. Pre- and post-test survey results showed that teacher candidates who received the enhanced curriculum overwhelmingly reported that they felt better prepared to effectively work with parents and families (Groff & Knorr, 2010).

In a similar study at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, researchers found that after taking an enhanced training program, participants' attitudes towards parents increased, along with their knowledge and comfort levels about strategies to involve parents (Deslandes, Fournier, & Morin, 2008). These results indicate that an enhanced parent engagement curriculum during preservice teacher education may have a positive impact on new teachers' attitudes, knowledge and self-efficacy to engage parents. These results are consistent with Baum and McMurray-Schwarz' (2004) research that identified a need for parent engagement curriculum in preservice teacher education programs so that teacher candidates can develop appropriate beliefs and attitudes toward their future work with parents.

Overall, however, the research is scant, as is the empirical evidence indicating parent engagement pedagogy and practice in preservice teacher education is an effective and impactful approach to better preparing new teachers to effectively work with parents. This is precisely the

pathway to guide further and future research on parent engagement pedagogy within preservice teacher education programs, and the course of research I commence here in my thesis.

Currently, Ontario faculties of education are transitioning from a one year to a two year Bachelor of Education degree. All faculties of education are involved in the restructuring of their curriculum to adjust to the newly expanded program duration and to meet new accreditation guidelines issued by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). These new guidelines have increased recommendations to faculties of education for parent engagement and communication. These expanded guidelines are intended to ensure teacher candidates recognize the importance of parent engagement, develop communication and relationship building skills, and embrace the strengths of diverse families in support of student learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). Specifically, the competencies teacher candidates are expected to acquire through new preservice education programming include:

- The shared interest of schools, families and community in student well-being, learning and development
- The positive ways in which families can contribute to each student's learning
- Developing positive reciprocal relationships with families, individually and collectively
- The importance of shared high expectations
- Seeking help to understand and help address barriers that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning
- Proactive and positive communication with parents and caregivers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014, p. 33).

Thus, the central research question of this thesis is, *how do Ontario faculties of education plan to implement guidelines pertinent to parent engagement as recommended by the Ontario College of Teachers?*

Given the current challenges in adequately preparing new teachers to effectively work with parents, it is important to study how faculties of education plan to implement these new guidelines. The following research explores the current one year and proposed two year Bachelor of Education degree programs and looks at how faculties of education prepare teacher candidates for parent engagement. This research will provide valuable insight and information regarding how we might better prepare teachers for parent engagement, before they enter the field. Furthermore, this research will provide insight into how the implementation of expanded accreditation guidelines may better align teacher competencies and expectations with current provincial parent engagement policy and research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Historical Context of Parent Engagement

For centuries, parents were the primary educators of children. They raised their children from birth and taught them fundamental skills and values that were deeply embedded in the culturally and socially rich contexts in which they lived. Parents were responsible for nurturing and guiding their children through the various stages of their development through to adulthood. However, a dramatic shift in children's education began to occur during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the rise of Western industrialization. As technological industry and the need for greater productivity grew, so did the support for organized, formal, public education.

Over time, compulsory school laws were established that mandated the role of schools as the primary educators of children (Moss, 2001). This set homes apart from formal schooling and parental control gradually diminished as the state took greater control over children's rights and educational policy (Moss, 2001). The demand for improved teacher qualifications and training increased and the teaching profession unionized (Moss, 2001).

With a relatively high level of education and social and economic background, teachers were placed in an elite position of power when dealing with their students' parents (Moss, 2001). The rights and responsibilities of a child's education, once held by parents, were legislated and placed in the hands of school authorities (Moss, 2001). A false dichotomy between educators as the experts in educational matters and parents as the non-experts became entrenched. Failing to recognize or acknowledge that parents could be experts, too, in different things related to their child, educators became the experts, holding the valued knowledge, power and authority to make all the decisions about educational matters (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Moss, 2001; Pushor, 2012).

Parents' advisory role in decision-making regarding their children's education continues today, for example, with voluntary participation on school councils. Administrators consult and take into consideration recommendations from parents, but they ultimately retain the authority and accountability for all educational decisions in fulfillment of the requirements mandated by the Ministry of Education. Parent membership, elections, terms of office, meeting protocol, voting procedures, and even a code of ethics for school council members is regulated by Ontario's Education Act (Ministry of Education, 2002).

With government, board and school policies outlining the operation and duties of parent-led groups, the role of parents can be perceived as being set within a narrowly prescribed framework (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Pushor, 2007). Providing a prescribed vehicle in which parents may participate that is further wrapped in complex layers of regulation and legislation becomes a barrier. This potentially makes it difficult for parents to be involved in decisions regarding their child's education. Consequently, parents have limited collective input or shared democratic decision-making into the policy that governs their very participation. According to Kozak (2009), the implicit assumption is that in order to participate, parents must play by the system's rules. That is, the formal structures of school councils, for example, remain governed by the bureaucracy, rules and regulations of the education system. Parents may feel as though they have limited input on the decisions affecting their children's education because those decisions are subject to administrative rules and regulations over which they have little or no control (Moss, 2001). Moss questions:

How can parents, often with little training or knowledge of either the education system or their legal rights, play a significant role in guiding their child when so much of that role has been delegated by the state to public schools and professional educators? (p. 4)

Mired in multitudinous policies and regulations, efforts to change the perspective of parents as the non-experts who serve a more passive role in their child's education have been slow. After a century of exclusion, there are more opportunities for parents to be included today than ever before with, for example, the development of school councils and PICs. However, despite this slow shift towards greater parental inclusion, remnants of the expert model, as I will argue next, remain inherent in education today.

The Expert Model in Parent Involvement Discourse

When it comes to parent involvement, there is often confusion surrounding its definition and what it encompasses. Being involved or engaged can mean a variety of different things to each teacher and parent, and it becomes particularly confusing when we tend to use the terms parent involvement and parent engagement interchangeably. Essentially, there are hundreds of different ways schools, parents, families and the community can be involved to support student learning. Perhaps the most well-known framework for involvement comes from Joyce Epstein's (2006) research. Her six types of involvement provide a comprehensive scaffold to involvement and include the following categories: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. With each type of involvement, Epstein highlights strategies and practices that schools can use as a guide to create and sustain parent, family, school, and community partnerships. Some of these strategies include having parents volunteer at the school, encouraging parents to participate on school councils, and providing regular communication about school programs and student progress (Epstein, 2006).

To be involved, then, is to do things; to participate in activities that serve a purpose. In Epstein's framework, that purpose is to create partnerships; a process that is more closely aligned with earlier definitions and examples of parent engagement. The difference between parent

engagement and involvement is that parent engagement is the process of relationship building, based upon reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust that facilitates greater parent-teacher collaboration in support of student success, while parent involvement comprises the activities that facilitate engagement.

Ferlazzo (2011) reinforces this concept of parent engagement as a process when he states that the purpose of engagement is not to serve clients, but rather, to gain partners by developing parent relationships and strengthening families. According to Ferlazzo effective engagement requires schools to develop relationship building processes, focused on listening, that recognize and value parents and families as partners in their children's education.

Ferlazzo emphasizes, however, that parent involvement and engagement are not mutually exclusive; both are important for student and school success. As Ferlazzo maintains, "almost all the research says that any kind of increased parent interest and support of students can help. But almost all the research also says that family engagement can produce even better results" (para. 6). In making the distinction between involvement and engagement, Ferlazzo asks, do your efforts "tend toward *doing to* or *doing with* families?" (p. 12).

What Ferlazzo suggests is that efforts that tend to do things *to* parents, such as automated phone calls or sending home one-way forms of communication such as newsletters, reflect parent involvement. Conversely, efforts that promote doing things *with* parents, such as having a conversation about a child's learning goals and support at home, reflect parent engagement. The research literature demonstrates support for Ferlazzo's perspective in that parent engagement has been shown to facilitate greater outcomes for overall student success compared to that of parent involvement (Ferlazzo, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2005).

For example, many schools utilize strategies to involve parents in school-based or school related activities and some researchers argue that these types of activities demonstrate parent involvement rather than parent engagement (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Kozak, 2009; Pushor, 2007). Conventional definitions of parent involvement, in line with Epstein's (2006) framework, include the participation in a range of activities from, "good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board or provincial committees, communicating and meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3). However, Kozak (2009) identifies some of the assumptions in traditionally accepted definitions of what constitutes involvement that can become barriers to authentic parent engagement.

Such definitions of involvement narrowly outline what parents are expected to participate in. These activities tend to support previously established school structures, such as joining school councils, attending school activities like meet-the-teacher nights, and supporting school routines that include homework or volunteering in the classroom (Kozak, 2009). This is what Pushor (2007) calls parent involvement that serves the school's agenda; that is, a script for doing the things educators ask or expect them to do. These agendas support the structure and function of school routines. They are often well established and can predetermine the roles of both parents and educators (Pushor, 2007).

For these reasons, traditionally accepted and prescribed school involvement can be perceived as a deterrent or barrier to parents wanting to be involved in their child's education, but through ways that fall outside the school's acceptable criteria (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Kozak, 2009; Pushor, 2007). Furthermore, continuing to define parent involvement through the participation in school-based or school related activities, such as volunteering in the classroom or

joining school councils, seemingly places greater value on those types of activities, rather than promoting them as some of the many different ways parents can positively contribute to their child's education.

Within the framework of the expert model, both teachers and parents construct beliefs and assumptions, based upon personal knowledge and experience, regarding the role of teachers and the role of parents in a child's formal education. The roles of expert and non-expert are continuously played out by teachers and parents alike. These scripted roles reinforce the idea that there are professional boundaries between home and school (Moss, 2001; Pushor, 2007). Not only does the expert model continue to reinforce the disconnect between home and school, it has helped shape, through various policy development and implementation, the implicit expectations and acceptable ways parents may be involved in their children's education.

This scripted story of school as protectorate, according to Pushor (2007), marginalizes parents and takes for granted the meaningful roles they play in their children's education. A failure to recognize parents' diverse ideas of what it means to participate in their child's learning limits opportunities for parents to share their expertise related to their child (Kozak, 2009; Pushor, 2007). It can potentially be perceived that education policymakers have determined, on behalf of all parents belonging to a uniform group, what they expect and believe to be the acceptable ways parents can be involved in their children's education. Furthermore, researchers Weiss et al. (2010) argue that behind much education policy and practice is the explicit assumption, "that school is the only place where and when children learn" (p. 6). Rather than a shared landscape, where parents and schools share in the responsibility of a child's success, assumptions within the expert model become a barrier, placing parents in the margins of the school landscape (Pushor, 2007; Weiss et al., 2010). When parents are not an integral part of a

school's landscape, there becomes diminished opportunities for meaningful parent engagement, as defined by Pushor (2007).

Having parental expectations for involvement is one thing; having parental willingness to participate in a prescribed set of ways is quite a different matter. Kozak (2009) argues that the implicit assumption in traditional views of involvement is that parents must assimilate if they want to participate in their children's learning (Kozak, 2009). This is because the determination of what constitutes effective and acceptable parental involvement still lies within the power of the schools, school boards and policymakers, not the parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Moss, 2001; Pushor, 2007). As Crozier and Davies (2007) maintain, "there are differences between getting parents through the door and ensuring that they have an equitable role in democratic participation" in their child's education (p. 306). For Kozak (2009) this is problematic because those parents that do not participate in the acceptably defined ways of the school are too readily deemed inadequate, uninterested or labeled as hard to reach parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Kozak, 2009).

Researchers Crozier and Davies (2007) found the assumption of hard to reach parents to be very much the opposite. They argue, "that rather than parents being 'hard to reach', it is frequently the schools themselves that inhibit accessibility for certain parents" (Crozier & Davies, 2007, p. 296). In their study of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents' perceived lack of involvement, schools claimed that these communities were impenetrable and they often cited cultural differences to explain the parents' hard to reach behaviours (Crozier & Davies, 2007). One cultural assumption was the belief that minority parents did not value education. This assumption is consistent with other research findings that when parents do not respond in the ways that are expected of them, it is quite common for educators to assume those parents suffer

from apathy and do not care about their child's education (Constantino, 2012; Constantino, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007).

Another problem identified by Crozier and Davies (2007) was that school staff could not understand why Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents did not want to learn English. These collective assumptions, the failure to recognize and respect differences, conclusions of apathy, and expectations for English language assimilation, can create barriers to building meaningful relationships with parents. In turn, these attitudes can contribute to a school climate best described by Henderson et al. (2007) as a fortress school. A fortress school's premise is based upon the expert model, such that parents belong at home, not at school, and if students do not do well, it is the fault of the parents (Henderson et al., 2007). Indicators of a fortress school include the beliefs that minority parents do not value education, that it is important to keep community influences out of the school, and that parents need to learn English (Henderson et al., 2007).

As Crozier and Davies (2007) studied the schools' expectations for parent involvement, they found that the role of parents was set within a narrowly prescribed framework. Similar to what Kozak (2009) described, the expectations for parent involvement had, "to fit a particular set of criteria" (Crozier & Davies, 2007, p. 296). The school's expectations for involvement were also biased towards Western, white, middle class ideals and that these attitudes and beliefs had become a part of the school's inherent culture (Crozier & Davies, 2007). For example, one school organized a wine and cheese social that clearly excluded the Muslim parents and families in the community because of their beliefs in abstaining from alcohol. Fashion shows and the inappropriateness of many other school activities proved to be a barrier to minority parents and families attending school events (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Ultimately, failing to recognize and

demonstrate respect for the multicultural diversity within the school further marginalized many students, parents, families, and the community.

Much like Pushor's (2007) school as protectorate and the fortress school depicted by Henderson et al. (2007), the researchers found that typical home and school relations followed the expert model by failing to acknowledge the value and strengths diverse parents have to offer. For example, the schools sent out lots of information to the parents but the primary mode of communication consisted of newsletters, in English only, thereby ensuring passive compliance from those parents not fluent in English (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Communication without reciprocity or opportunities for parents to give their input and feedback is an example of an ineffective type of one-way communication.

Crozier and Davies (2007) describe how one-way communication demonstrates a compliance discourse that enables schools to employ the rhetoric of encouraging greater parent involvement. An over-reliance on one-way communication methods, however, potentially sends the implicit message that schools are not truly prepared to listen to or hear from parents. Together, the negative views, fears and cultural assumptions held by the school staff pathologized the Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents and further placed the blame on them for their perceived indifference (Crozier & Davies, 2007). It is precisely this kind of cultural interference that Crozier and Davies (2007) believe serves as an excuse for schools not to become more proactive in parent and family involvement efforts.

Many parents in Crozier and Davies' (2007) study were very much involved in their children's learning, but in ways that ran contrary to the school's set of acceptable criteria. The community, for example, plays a significant role in a Bangladeshi child's education. The maintenance of the Bangladeshi family and of family honour is essential to the stability of the

community, therefore, providing a supportive home and family background ensures that Bangladeshi children become upstanding members of their community (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

Acknowledging the needs, values, traditions and the role of community in a Bangladeshi child's education was overlooked by the schools. What the schools did value and expect from parents was not clearly communicated, if at all, as this information was primarily sent home via English only newsletters. Thus, parents, with their lack of access to the privileged school knowledge, were at a disadvantage because of their inability to interpret and understand the school's expectations. To these parents, schools represented spaces of exclusion that were insecure, potentially hostile, and places where they were rendered vulnerable, for example, by language barriers (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Under such circumstances, the reality is that schools are hard to reach, not parents or families. Crozier and Davies conclude:

that the schools, and in particular the secondary schools, are 'hard to reach' for many of the parents in our study because many expectations are assumed and thus 'hidden'. The emphasis within notions of 'involvement' does not include a sharing of views and ideas and in this sense there is a lack of a sense of respect and, albeit unwittingly, a message is given out that the parents are not valued. Schools expend huge amounts of energy, time and resources in sending out information to parents. The fact that it is not an effective way of 'involving' parents or empowering them to take a more proactive role has to be reconsidered. (p. 311)

Although situated within the United Kingdom, Crozier and Davies' (2007) work is helpful in our understanding of how diverse parents and families may come to perceive Ontario schools as hard to reach or fortress schools. To illustrate, the city of Toronto is recognized as

being one of the most multicultural cities in the world with over half the city's population born outside of Canada (City of Toronto, 2013). With 30% of all recent immigrants to Canada and 20% of all immigrants in Canada calling Toronto home, there are racialized patterns of poverty and inequality among Toronto's public schools (City of Toronto, 2013; People for Education, 2013). In low-income schools, students are four times more likely to be recent immigrants compared to high-income schools (People for Education, 2013). Thirty-five percent of students in low-income schools have a first language other than English or French, compared to 13% in high-income schools (People for Education, 2013).

These racialized patterns highlight the importance of understanding how Crozier and Davies' (2007) cultural interference model may impede a school's parent engagement efforts such that the school becomes perceived as hard to reach. Moreover, the implicit expectations and acceptable ways parents may be involved in their children's education, as defined by the school, can represent barriers to authentic engagement. It is especially challenging for parents when these messages are wrapped in complex layers of legislation and policy. Efforts to meaningfully engage parents are further complicated when policy remains focused, despite evidence-based research, on traditional and ineffective ways of involving parents in their children's learning.

An example of this is Ontario's parent engagement policy. While attempting to promote parents as valued partners in education, much of the policy remains focused on activities that reflect traditional views of involvement that serve the needs of the school, such as helping with homework, serving on school councils, volunteering in the classroom or on school trips, and meeting with teachers (Ferlazzo, 2011; Kozak, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005; Pushor, 2007). As a result, many schools guided by the parent engagement policy continue to utilize strategies to involve parents in school-based or school related activities. This potentially

sends mixed messages about what types of parent involvement are valued. Is it volunteering in the classroom, or is it, “relationships built on a foundation of partnership and cooperation?” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.28).

Identifying participation that fits a narrowly defined set of criteria may further marginalize parents by taking for granted the diverse and meaningful roles they play in their children’s education (Crozier & Davies, 2007). As a barrier to authentic engagement, preferential recommendation of activities that serve existing school structures and agendas reflects the expert model and does not, “effectively ‘set the table’ for parents to more fully participate” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 1).

It is plausible to see how efforts to effectively engage parents may be hindered by policy that remains focused, despite evidence-based research, on traditional school-based and school related involvement practices. As guided by current provincial policy, there is a tendency to associate parent involvement too narrowly with school-based or school related activities, such as parents attending meet-the-teacher events. The trouble with this assumption is that it mistakenly places greater value on school-based and school related involvement than on what parents can do at home, which is exactly the opposite of what the research is saying. I now move forward to discuss the evidence-based research that shows the type of parent involvement that really matters in supporting overall student success.

Parent Engagement and Improved Student Outcomes

Decades of research have shown that parent involvement in their children’s education has a positive, significant impact on the development and overall success of their child (Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education [CADRE], 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Weiss & Stephen, 2009; Emerson, Fear, Fox, &

Sanders, 2012). Some of these benefits include improved academic achievement, better attendance and improved behaviour both at home and at school, greater enrolment in challenging academic programs, higher graduation rates, increased confidence among parents in their children's learning, and better socialization and adaptation to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Emerson et al., 2012). In addition to the many positive outcomes for students and parents, the ability to effectively work with parents can contribute to a more positive school climate and greater teacher retention (Caspe et al., 2011; Emerson et al., 2012).

There are specific types of parent involvement practices, as demonstrated by what families do at home to support their children's learning, that have been found to be more important than what parents do at school, such as volunteering or attending meetings. Several research studies reveal that parents have the greatest influence on achievement outcomes through supporting learning at home rather than supporting traditional activities at school (CADRE, 2002; Centre for Real World Learning, 2010; Flamboyan Foundation, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; People for Education, 2011; Weiss & Stephen, 2009).

For example, in a meta-analysis of 41 studies, Jeynes (2005) examined the relation of specific components of parental participation to elementary student academic achievement. He found that parental engagement in children's learning at home had a greater influence on student academic achievement than parental participation in school-based or school related activities (Jeynes, 2005). Parental engagement practices at home included having high expectations for learning and success, consistently reading to and with your child, and regularly talking together about learning and school (Jeynes, 2005). Furthermore, Jeynes (2005) found that the positive

impact of these specific parental practices on student's academic achievement holds when differences in gender, race and socio-economic status (SES) are controlled for. These results are encouraging in that any child may experience the advantages of greater parental engagement at home and furthermore suggests that it may be a means of narrowing the achievement gap between students from racial and income disparate backgrounds (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Kendall, Straw, Jones, Springate, & Grayson, 2008; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004).

But the greatest opportunity for improved student outcomes, especially for at-risk students, occurs when parents, families, schools, and community organizations work together in partnership (Bouffard, Little, & Weiss, 2006; CADRE, 2002; Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss & Stephen, 2009). For example, Bouffard et al. (2006) examined a comprehensive collection of out-of-school time (OST) programs across the United States aimed at building, evaluating and sustaining home-school-community partnerships in support of student learning and development. The primary goal of OST programs is to mobilize existing community resources and create partnerships for the benefit of students and their families (Bouffard et al., 2006). Community partners included businesses with funding and apprenticeship opportunities, libraries, museums, social and health services, youth centres, government agencies, other schools, colleges and universities, non-profit organizations and religious groups. In addition to creating networks of support with community organizations, a key element of OST programs includes partnering and collaborating with parents and families.

Many OST programs were highlighted by Bouffard et al. (2006) for the positive impact they had on student learning and development. Examples include PlusTime New Hampshire, North Carolina Centre for After School Programs, The Peace Drum Project, Best Fit After

School Program in Los Angeles, and the Boston After School & Beyond Partners for Student Success.

One such program, Generación Diez or (G-10), is a comprehensive school-based after school program that addresses the challenges of Latino students and their families. Goals of the program include improving Latino children's academic achievement, improving social adjustment, and promoting school success and well-being through home visits (Bouffard et al., 2006). Standardized tests given twice a year assess the program's impact and results have shown significant growth in students' academic achievement. For example, when students first enter the G-10 program, they typically score in the bottom 15% in reading and spelling compared to their peers (Bouffard et al., 2006). By spring, the scores generally increase to the bottom third with students demonstrating average reading and spelling proficiency by the end of the second year (Bouffard et al., 2006). Benefits of other OST programs include decreased high school drop-out rates, increased school attendance, crime reduction, an increase in positive behaviours, adoption of healthier lifestyles, improved family and peer relationships, increased parent-teacher contact, an increase in the quality of parent-teacher relationships, and an increase in parental engagement in children's learning (Bouffard et al., 2006).

The success of OST programs contributes to the research showing that engaging parents, families and the community contributes to children's academic and social success (Bouffard, Little, & Weiss, 2006; CADRE, 2002; Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss & Stephen, 2009). Building home-school-community partnerships is an excellent model of parent engagement in practice. It demonstrates the process of relationship building where educators, parents and the community work together in partnership to create a shared school landscape in support of a common purpose – student

success. When we embrace partnerships with a purpose, these “partnerships allow us to demonstrate what authentic collaboration looks like” (Sider, 2013).

The ability to effectively partner with parents, families and the community is essential for teachers and schools in their efforts to fulfill provincial legislation, such as Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2009). Effective home-school-community partnerships is the basis of Ontario’s whole-school approach to reducing bullying behaviours and promoting a more positive and inclusive school environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012b). The whole-school approach recognizes that all stakeholders play an important role in supporting student learning. A commitment to investing in collaborative relationships that extend beyond the school to include parents, families and the greater community is the foundation of the whole-school approach (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012b). As I discuss next, parent engagement, home-school-community partnerships, and whole-school approaches are elements that have shown promise in preservice teacher education programs in better preparing new teachers to effectively work with parents.

Parent Engagement Pedagogy in Preservice Teacher Education

Much of the content emphasis within initial teacher education programs in Canada is, “about who is to be taught (learners), what is to be taught (subject matter and curriculum), how to teach (principles and practice of teaching), where the teaching takes place (context), and why teach (foundations of teaching)” (Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2008, p. 15). This is consistent with research that highlights the limited time committed to parent engagement pedagogy in preservice teacher education programs (Evans, 2012; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Kozak, 2009; Patte, 2011; Pushor, 2007) and that is further misaligned with current provincial policy.

According to new accreditation guidelines for parent engagement in preservice teacher education programs, teacher candidates are expected to acquire knowledge and skills pertaining to positive communication with parents and the development of reciprocal relationships (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). As Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) argue, these important skills are not given enough attention in preservice teacher education programs. Although the importance of effective and appropriate communication and conflict resolution may be stressed in preservice teacher education programs, teacher candidates are not often taught the skills needed to be successful in that area (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Not surprisingly, effectively communicating with and engaging parents in support of student learning remains one of the greatest challenges new teachers face.

It follows that there is very little research on parent engagement pedagogy and practice in preservice teacher education programs. A recent curriculum enhancement initiative for preservice teacher candidates was struck between Ottawa University and the Kansas Parent Information Resources Center. The curriculum enhancement included the latest research on parent engagement, effective strategies for fostering relationships with families, and a practicum that required teacher candidates to work directly with selected families (Groff & Knorr, 2010).

The results showed that participants who received the enhanced curriculum overwhelmingly reported that they felt better prepared to effectively work with parents and families (Groff & Knorr, 2010). These teachers also demonstrated a stronger commitment to the sharing of power and the inclusion of parents as partners in their child's education (Groff & Knorr, 2010). After having received the enhanced curriculum, teachers felt they had improved their ability to develop effective strategies to work with parents and to help parents support their children's learning at home (Groff & Knorr, 2010).

In response to a study that found preservice teachers had low self-efficacy to utilize effective parent involvement strategies, researchers in Quebec designed and implemented a training program for parent-school-community partnerships that was included as one of the teacher education foundation courses (Deslandes, Fournier, & Morin, 2008). In cooperation with the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, the researchers conducted pre- and post-test surveys to determine whether or not the new training program had an effect on preservice teachers' knowledge, comfort levels, personal attitudes and beliefs regarding parent and community involvement (Deslandes et al., 2008). Results indicated that preservice teachers increased their knowledge and comfort levels about parent and community involvement programs (Deslandes et al., 2008). Participants' attitudes toward parent involvement significantly increased, especially in regards to acknowledging the importance of parents as partners, and recognizing the strengths that every family has to offer in support of student learning (Deslandes et al., 2008).

No significant effects were found for the importance of specific parent involvement activities or for the frequency of such activities. Deslandes et al. (2008) suggest, however, that the lack of significance is due to speculation on behalf of the participants as, being teacher candidates, they had not yet entered the field of teaching, nor had they classrooms of their own to practice specific strategies. Consequently, one area of future research would be to investigate the longevity of observed changes in attitudes and self-efficacy levels throughout preservice education and how these changes might then transfer into new teachers' inservice practice.

Although the majority of new teachers strongly agree that effective teachers need to be able to work well with students' parents (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2005), they lack the practice and skills that are needed to do so effectively (Lopez & Patton, 2013). During a teacher candidates' practicum or placement in the field, there may be limited direct interaction

with parents. It is important to note that the associate teacher or cooperating teacher that oversees practicum placements within schools plays a significant and crucial role in whether or not teacher candidates will have the opportunity to work with parents.

A key recommendation by Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) is for teacher educators to explicitly identify their goals for parent engagement in the practicum component of their preservice teacher education programs. Clarifying expectations for a practicum that includes working with parents may facilitate greater opportunities for teacher candidates to be involved with parents across the curriculum (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Alternatively, missed opportunities during field placements further limits the chances for teacher candidates to gain valuable parent engagement experience, such as practicing their communication and relationship building skills, before they enter the field (Patton & Wanless, 2013).

Recognizing the need for more practical training and opportunities to acquire skills, some universities are moving away from traditional preservice teacher education programs that tend to focus more on curriculum delivery. In California, for example, UCLA amalgamated an apprenticeship-type model into their preservice teacher education program. The apprenticeship approach is similar to a residency program that is often seen in other professions, such as medicine (Johnson, 2013). This mentorship program, rooted in authentic collaboration, reciprocal feedback, and transformative partnerships, enabled new teachers to gain competence, hone skills and gradually progress from novice practitioners to more experienced teachers (Black, 2004; Johnson, 2013).

A comparable mentorship program was developed in Halifax that provided new teachers with greater personal support and opportunities for collaborative and reflective practices (Power, 2013). Although part of an inservice rather than a preservice program, the New Teacher Support

Program proved to be a successful, multi-faceted approach that gave new teachers, “time to improve their skills under the watchful eye of experts – and time to reflect, learn from mistakes, and work with colleagues as they acquire(d) good judgment and tacit knowledge about teaching and learning” (Black, 2004, p. 47; Power, 2013).

Both of these teacher residency programs demonstrate the importance of practice in learning, or pedagogy. The principles of Bandura’s (1989) social cognitive theory and Dewey’s (1938/1997) experiential learning are highly relevant to new teachers developing their capacity to effectively communicate and interact with students’ parents. We learn by observing and doing within contexts that facilitate continuous and reciprocal interaction between the individual, the environment, and their behaviour (Bandura, 1986). This continuous interaction is also reflected in Dewey’s (1938/1997) theoretical framework on education: “sound educational experience involves, above all, continuity and interaction between the learner and what is being learned (p. 10). The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite” (p. 44).

Myers’ (2013) research on programming in teacher education, highlights how pedagogy is only important insofar as it connects with practice. This is relevant in teaching parent engagement pedagogy, as the ability to communicate effectively and develop relationships are critical skills to acquire. Thus, preservice teacher education programs that inspire a sharing of practice would be valuable for teacher candidates such that there would be greater opportunities to develop the competence and skills they need to effectively work with their students’ parents, before they enter the field.

Other researchers have also stressed the importance of practice in preservice teacher education programs (Epstein, 2006; Evans, 2012; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Lopez & Patton, 2013;

Uludag, 2006) and this has led to the development of a new and unique, innovative approach to teacher training. The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) has developed a Parent, Family, Community Engagement (PFCE) Simulation. This simulation enables teachers to practice effective parent engagement techniques in a virtual environment, such as developing their communication skills with parents and practicing strategies that help build rapport and relationships (Thacker & Richard, 2013).

The PFCE provides teachers with a safe place to practice interacting with parents where participants can choose a wrong answer and experience the repercussions without having to endure the real-life consequences (Thacker & Richard, 2013). As Thacker and Richard (2013) explain: “there is some real value in purposefully taking the incorrect steps so that you can see what happens” (para. 7). Shared reflective practice is an essential component of the simulation where participants have the opportunity to discuss in collaboration, the different approaches they took, what elements worked and those that were less successful (Thacker & Richard, 2013).

So the challenge, then, is for preservice teacher education programs to not only prepare teacher candidates to understand the current research and benefits of parent engagement, but also to provide them with opportunities to practice research-based strategies that are known to be effective in engaging parents in ways that facilitate positive student outcomes (Epstein, 2013). As the research has shown, a teacher’s capacity to effectively engage parents, such as building relationships and facilitating home-school-community partnerships, has a positive impact on student outcomes. In the next chapter I explore how partnership models in education closely resemble social networks, the theoretical framework of social capital theory.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

In the literature review, I explored the expert model as a barrier to parent engagement and how traditional views of parent involvement have been shown to be less effective in improved student outcomes. What the research literature has shown to be more desirable in supporting student success and overall well-being is parent engagement. The following demonstrates how parent engagement can be studied through the lens of *Social Capital Theory* (Hanifan, 1916).

The partnership model in social capital theory provides greater insight into how we can better address inequity, at-risk, and student achievement gap issues. My views are based upon research that has shown the greatest opportunity for improved student outcomes, especially for at-risk students, occurs when parents, families, schools, and community organizations work together in partnership (Bouffard, Little, & Weiss, 2006; CADRE, 2002; Child Trends, 2014a; Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010; Weiss & Stephen, 2009). Consequently, it is social capital theory and other emerging partnership models in education that provide the theoretical framework for this research. When we commit to breaking down the barriers of the expert model and embrace more collaborative approaches, as characterized by partnership models, we can begin to provide all children with an equitable chance at success, access to resources, and greater opportunities to achieve their potential (People for Education, 2013).

Parent Engagement and Social Capital Theory

There is a wealth of evidence-based research emphasizing the many positive benefits for students, parents, and schools when all stakeholders work together in purposeful partnerships. Collaborative partnerships, built upon mutually respectful relationships in support of a common

goal - our children's education - have much in common with social capital theory. From the research fields of sociology and political science, the roots of social capital theory can be traced back almost 100 years ago to a school superintendent. While promoting a parent engagement strategy, Hanifan (1916) discovered a multitude of societal and economic benefits in transforming a local school into a networking hub of the community.

Social capital theory emphasizes the value that is found in social networks that facilitate a range of mutual benefits for its members (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Hanifan, 1916; Li & Christ, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2014). These benefits can include physical and economic reinforcement, such as better employment outcomes, better health, and higher educational achievement (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Additionally, social capital can help provide social and emotional support, greater access to informational resources, and more meaningful connections with others (Dufur et al., 2013; Parcel & Pennell, 2012).

At its essence, social capital theory is about formal and informal networks. These networks are defined as an accumulation of personal relationships when people interact with each other across a variety of contexts or meeting places (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Shared values develop from these relationships that are in turn, contingent upon trust and reciprocity (Office for National Statistics, 2014; Dufur et al., 2013). Trust is a key indicator and measure of social capital.

Arguably, parent engagement is a form of social capital. Consistent with Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory, social capital theorists maintain that children learn from multiple, interacting social and cultural contexts that reciprocally influence behaviour and performance. With multiple factors across multiple domains influencing educational attainment,

efforts to improve student outcomes that address an array of needs are more likely to be successful than strategies that focus on individual factors in isolation (Child Trends, 2014a).

Dufur et al. (2013) examined several social capital contexts and their influence on educational outcomes, making a clear distinction between family social capital and school social capital. The bond between parent and child is the first and most intimate relationship in a child's life. Moreover, a parent is a child's first teacher. With purposeful investment, an underlying construct of social capital, parents teach and guide their child's physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive development (Dufur et al., 2013). The choices parents make for their child, along with their expectations and involvement in their children's education is influential in promoting a child's academic achievement. Within social capital research, this family social capital is also called bonding capital as it refers to the diverse range of intra-family connections and supports in a child's life (Dufur et al., 2013; Parcel & Pennell, 2012).

As defined by Dufur et al. (2013) school capital is the social capital that develops at school and refers to the purposeful investment between a child and their school that promotes academic achievement and overall student success. It is comprised of the relationships students have with their teachers and other school personnel along with the resources, funding and programs schools have to support student learning. School capital also includes the relationships that parents have with teachers and other school members, bearing in mind that trust between individuals and institutions is a key indicator of social capital (Dufur et al., 2013). Fortress schools (Henderson et al., 2007) or those hard to reach schools (Crozier & Davies, 2007) that have an unwelcoming climate, would be low on school social capital.

Social capital researchers have found that children also benefit from the social connections and investments that their families have with other parents, neighbours, community

organizations and work colleagues (Dufur et al., 2013; Parcel & Pennell, 2012). Known as bridging social capital, this places families within a broader range of networks. This helps to extend both personal and professional connections for children and their families, thus providing increased opportunities for greater access to social resources.

The social capital framework closely resembles home-school-community partnership models found in parent engagement research literature and in provincial policy such as the whole-school approach in Ontario's Accepting Schools Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). Essentially, the stronger these social capital connections are, the greater a family's access to social resources and support. Because a child's education is a shared responsibility between home and school, all three types of social capital, bonding, school and bridging, play an important role in a child's educational outcome (Dufur et al., 2013). According to Dufur et al. (2013) social capital theory:

explains the mechanisms and processes by which bonds between children and other actors, such as their parents or their teachers, produce academic achievement. Adult investment in children is more than supervision; it creates the mechanisms via which children are socialized and educated. (p. 3)

The research conducted by Dufur et al. (2013) found that family social capital has a greater positive impact on academic achievement than school social capital, even after controlling for gender, race and socio-economic factors. These results are consistent with previously discussed parent engagement research that finds home-based support and family activities have a greater influence on educational outcomes than participation in school-based or school related activities (Emerson et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2005; People for Education, 2011).

One implication that arises from both social capital and parent engagement research in supporting student achievement is that schools would do better by implementing relationship building strategies that encourage greater social capital at home (bonding) than at school. Additionally, a teacher's capacity for building home-school-community partnerships may provide improved outcomes for at-risk students as this helps to increase a student's bridging social capital through greater support and access to resources.

Building social capital through home-school-community partnerships has tremendous impact on the overall success of students, especially those at risk, in addition to the many positive outcomes for parents, teachers, schools and communities (Dufur et al., 2013). It seems plausible, then, that schools investing in a variety of strategies to improve school and student achievement should include recommendations for greater home-school-community partnerships and parent engagement that builds relationships and increases social capital. Drawing once again upon the extensive research by Henderson et al. (2007), Table 2 provides some examples of effective parent engagement strategies for teachers that can help build social capital for students, parents, and their families.

Rather than integrating parent engagement strategies into a school's existing plans for improving student achievement, it appears that parent engagement efforts are still viewed separately by schools; that is, as add-on initiatives that are implemented as standalone strategies. Instead of including strategies to increase social capital through parent engagement efforts, Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenberg (2010) argue that reform efforts to turnaround poor performing schools and improve student achievement tend to overlook how parent engagement may complement and support their efforts. For example, in their reform efforts to improve academic achievement, schools tend to place greater emphasis on, "instructional/curriculum reforms,

changes in staffing, intensive professional development, and reorganizations of the structures of the school” (Weiss et al., 2010, p. 12). When schools overlook how parent engagement can complement their reform efforts, they fail to recognize how engagement strategies, such as creating home-school-community partnerships and investing in relationship building, can help all their students reach high levels of social and academic achievement (Henderson et al., 2007).

Table 2

Examples of Effective Parent Engagement for Teachers that Can Help Build Social Capital
(Henderson et al., 2007)

Building Social Capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers talk with parents about educational issues, legislation, how the education system works and how to be an advocate for their child • Teachers provide information and explain the curriculum, policies and requirements, such as standardized testing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers seek to create partnerships with local community organizations such as libraries, social services, medical and health departments, banks, businesses, etc. • Teachers identify the needs of their students’ families through surveys and meetings and provides them with the necessary connections and resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents from all backgrounds are invited to participate on school and/or district/board committees so that the diversity of the school community is represented • Parents are invited to provide input and participate in decision-making on educational matters such as school improvement plans and student achievement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are invited to participate in professional development and training alongside teachers and staff, such as workshops on best practices for technology use at home and in the classroom • Parents are surveyed on what continuing adult education, training, community, and after school programs they would like to have
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers collaborate with students, staff, community partners, and parents to develop school initiatives sensitive to diversity, equity, and inclusive issues • These initiatives are geared towards reaching those parents and families who are underrepresented because of social, economic, racial, and/or language barriers

A recent report released by Child Trends (2014b) found similar reform efforts largely focused on academic factors, such as improving teacher quality or strengthening curricula, and that, “assessments of students’ needs and strengths have been largely limited to academic measures” (p. 7). This is particularly salient when we think about the potential for parent engagement and social capital, with its diverse range of relationships and networks across multiple contexts, to help reduce the achievement gap between students from racial and income disparate backgrounds. It would be advantageous, then, to integrate parent engagement strategies with other reforms, in efforts to improve school and student outcomes. Efforts that embrace parent engagement recognize that, “relationships built on a foundation of partnership and cooperation have a positive impact on student learning and can help close the achievement gap” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.28).

The emerging research on social capital continues to demonstrate that increased social capital has a positive impact on learning outcomes. Developing greater social capital at home and at school, aimed at extending networks of relationships and access to resources, has a significant impact for at-risk students and children from racial and income disparate backgrounds. In a cross-case analysis of two low-SES single mothers, Li and Christ (2007) found that having a lack of literary resources at home, limited school connections, and a reduced network of social relationships (social capital) had a negative impact on low-SES children’s literacy achievement in school. In addition, the mother’s limited social capital contributed to less effective support and involvement in the child’s literacy practices at home, such that the reading practices at home did not align with the practices valued and expected by the school (Li & Christ, 2007).

Not surprisingly, parents hold diverse perspectives and assumptions about what they believe to be important for their child to learn, in addition to how they might encourage and support that learning at home. A parent's viewpoint and at-home practices can differ significantly from the school's expectations and curriculum. Early, timely and ongoing communication is key to ensuring teachers and parents are supporting a student's learning in consistent and similar ways both at home and at school.

The negative impact of low social capital is that some students will not have the same access to resources and education that their peers do. Early interventions that improve home and school connections have proven to be effective in promoting positive school outcomes for at-risk students, suggesting that an increase in social capital can offer protective effects for children (Dufur et al., 2013). Parcel and Pennell (2012) explain that, "building social capital is especially crucial for students from socio-economic and cultural backgrounds that disadvantage them in the school context" (p. 84). They propose that parents, students, teachers and community members can build social capital by using Child and Family Teams (CFTs) to strengthen school and home environments for children. CFTs are comprised of the student, members of their family, school personnel and community organizations that collaboratively identify a student's needs and carry out plans to address and support the student's needs (Parcel & Pennell, 2012).

Parcel and Pennell's (2012) conceptual partnership model represents a comprehensive approach to service; a system of care that helps build social capital at home (bonding), at school, and through networking with other community organizations (bridging) such as mental health agencies and social workers. They argue that parents, families, schools and communities that work together to build social capital promote better school connections, greater academic

achievement, improved family functioning, stronger home environments and a more culturally responsive school climate (Parcel & Pennell, 2012).

Integrated Student Supports (ISS) is a partnership framework that embraces a whole child approach by recognizing the importance of multiple contexts and influences on a child's development and success (Child Trends, 2014a). Firmly rooted within developmental psychology and social cognitive theory, ISS acknowledges that student success cannot simply be defined by academic outcomes. ISS takes into account non-academic factors such as a student's physical and mental health, safety, socio-emotional development, behaviour and social relationships (Child Trends, 2014a).

As a student-centered strategy, ISS identifies a student's specific needs and circumstances, coordinates the necessary networks and supports for the student, integrates those supports within the school, facilitates partnerships with parents and families, and links community networks and service organizations (Child Trends, 2014a; 2014b). For at-risk students, an integrated student supports approach is particularly effective because it is a comprehensive partnership model that applies across developmental domains, both academic and non-academic, for a variety of positive outcomes that include increased high school graduation and post-secondary school enrolment (Child Trends, 2014a; 2014b).

Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenberg (2010) propose a family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) framework as a strategy to support student success. They argue that parent and family engagement is a shared responsibility that should be systemic, integrated, and sustained, beginning in early childhood and continuing through to high school and beyond (Weiss et al., 2010). Much like the ISS framework, FSCE is a community of practice that supports and reinforces a child's learning across multiple contexts (Weiss et al., 2010).

Additionally, within the research on factors that help transform low-performing schools, one critical element that was found to be essential for a school's turnaround efforts to work, was to have in place strong and strategic FSCE (Weiss et al., 2010).

The research makes it clear that home-school-community partnership models in education, as integrated within the greater social capital framework, have a greater impact on school and student outcomes than traditional parent involvement efforts. It points to the benefits of teachers and schools encouraging greater parent engagement in support of children's learning and to a school's capacity to increase its social capital through home-school-community partnerships (Child Trends, 2014; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss & Stephen, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010). With child poverty in Canada and Ontario having changed very little since 1989 (Campaign 2000, 2013), this challenges our current education system to take a closer look at what they believe to be effective parent engagement practices, and to rethink what it takes for all children to have an equitable chance at success, access to resources, and to realize their potential (People for Education, 2013; Weiss & Stephen, 2009).

To reiterate this point, I would like to introduce some recent Canadian statistics on poverty and education. Alarming, one in seven Canadian children – including one in two children of immigrant families and one in four children in First Nations communities – still lives in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2013). Children who are experiencing poverty can present many challenges to teachers, such as coming to school hungry, experiencing income barriers to participating in nutrition programs and school-related activities, having poverty related barriers that impede school attendance including illness and instability at home, and students working in paid employment as a barrier to completing school work and maintaining grades (British Columbia Teachers' Federation [BCTF], 2013).

In a recent survey of teachers from British Columbia, almost 62% of teachers felt inadequately prepared to teach in a classroom where poverty issues were present (BCTF, 2013). The majority of teachers (83%) felt their preservice training and inservice training inadequately prepared them for teaching students who live in poverty (BCTF, 2013). Only one in five teachers (20.4%) rated their preservice training and inservice training as “somewhat adequate” (BCTF, 2013).

When asked about barriers to advocating for the needs of low-income students and their families, most teachers (81%) reported that there is lack of information on resources available to assist families, while 76.5% of teachers reported having experienced difficulty co-coordinating efforts between their school and community agencies (BCTF, 2013). Teachers rated the top three highest needs for additional resources at their schools to support students experiencing poverty as: counseling services for students and families (60.5%), greater accessibility to community services for low-income families (42.5%), and greater resources to strengthen connections between parents and schools (30.7%; BCTF, 2013). Extra teaching support to address learning gaps related to poverty was reported by 56.5% of teachers as being the number one priority area for the British Columbia Teachers Federation to focus upon (BCTF, 2013).

Interestingly, the top three highest needs for additional school resources in this research all point to increasing the social capital of students, parents, and their families who are living in poverty. Not only does this research highlight the lack of preservice and inservice training for teachers to effectively work with low-income families, it underlines a need for teachers to have the capacity for building greater home-school-community partnerships; the very essence of social capital theory.

Because socio-economic status continues to impact a child's chances for success, the capacity to build home-school-community partnerships needs to play a greater role in strategic development plans aimed at narrowing the achievement gap between racial and income disparate students. Furthermore, the barriers that are created by assumptions within the expert model need to be challenged, in addition to assumptions about the type of parent involvement that really matters. As the research has shown, while parent involvement is important in supporting the structures and functions of school routines, it is the process of parent engagement, or the building of relationships and partnerships, that provides the greatest opportunities for improved student outcomes.

If research has the ability to inform practice, then conceivably, current parent engagement and social capital research should be informing the development and implementation of more comprehensive strategies to engage parents in their children's learning. Research should be the basis of policy development and implementation that in turn, guides the procedures, training and support necessary to carry out such legislation. Yet, there is still a disconnect between home and school, between teachers and parents, despite a great deal of policy implementation in Ontario.

With 56.5% of teachers reporting that extra teaching support is the number one priority for addressing poverty issues within the classroom (BCTF, 2013), the training and support for teachers to enhance their ability to facilitate effective parent engagement and home-school-community partnerships appears to be limited. More and more, educators are confronted with the challenges of inequity, poverty, exclusion, special needs, and cultural diversity in their classrooms. These reasons alone demonstrate a need to invest in greater parent engagement pedagogy in teacher education programs. It is conceivable that the implementation of a more comprehensive, integrated curriculum of parent engagement in teacher education programs may

improve teachers' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards engaging parents and may better prepare and facilitate teachers' capacity for building home-school-community partnerships.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to survey and interview key stakeholders within Ontario faculties of education to determine how they plan to implement new OCT guidelines regarding parent engagement into the curriculum of their new two year Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs. Document analyses will examine what faculties of education have done to prepare teacher candidates to engage parents in their one year BEd programs, and what they plan to do in their new two year BEd programs. This comparative analysis will reveal the degree of modification to preservice teacher education programs to accommodate new parent engagement pedagogy and practice guidelines.

My goal is to explore parent engagement pedagogy and practice in Ontario's new preservice teacher education programs. I hope to gain insight and a better understanding of preservice parent engagement pedagogy and thus contribute to the existing literature that shows promise in an enhanced curriculum of parent engagement as a strategy to better prepare new teachers to engage parents. That is, I hope to better inform BEd programs with current evidence-based research on effective parent engagement pedagogy and practice that challenges traditional perspectives, and that better aligns teacher competencies and expectations in fulfillment of provincial parent engagement policy and related legislation.

Chapter 4

Method

Design

The following research design utilizes survey and document reviews. While the research and its elements were intended to be a mixed-methods study, the very low participant response to the survey component, described shortly, made the analysis primarily qualitative. A mixed methods approach enables the use of all the tools and techniques available within both qualitative and quantitative frameworks. The central premise of mixed methods research is that using both approaches in combination provides more comprehensive evidence and a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell, 2006).

The design of this research, including all materials and procedures, was approved by Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board.

Participants and Sample

Survey. There are currently 19 teacher education programs accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers. Only those programs that are publically funded were included in the survey. Those institutions that offered BEd degrees through Ministerial Consent or were non-affiliated members of the Ontario Association for Deans of Education (OADE) were excluded from the sample. Consequently, 13¹ faculties of education were invited to participate in the survey. Two institutions completed the online survey (see Appendix A).

¹ Brock University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Nipissing University, Queen's University, Trent University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, University of Windsor, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University, York University

Interview. Survey participants were also given the opportunity to take part in a follow up telephone interview, in English, that consisted of three questions (see Appendix B) and was to be approximately 25 minutes in length. If participants declined to take part in the follow up interview, they could still participate in the survey without penalty. If participants agreed to a follow up interview, they were instructed to provide their name, contact telephone number and/or email address at the end of the survey so that a suitable time for the interview could be arranged by the researcher. Neither individual who completed the survey agreed to participate in the follow up telephone interview. Therefore, any proposed interview protocols were discontinued.

One Year Bachelor of Education Document Review. Data from 12² faculties of education were included in the document review of the one year Bachelor of Education programs. The one year program at the University of Toronto and the French program at Laurentian University were excluded because these institutions had suspended their consecutive BEd programs. The researcher acknowledges limited French speaking and reading abilities, yet best efforts in searching French BEd program documents were made using Google translate. University Senate documents were not used in one year Bachelor of Education document reviews. See Table 3 for the types of documents that were used in the document reviews.

² Brock University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Nipissing University, Queen's University, Trent University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, University of Ottawa, University of Windsor, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University, York University

Table 3

Documents Used in the Document Review of One and Two Year BEd Programs

Document Type
Bachelor of Education Program Information
Bachelor of Education Program Progression
Course Lists, Calendars and Descriptions
Faculty of Education Brochures
Faculty of Education Websites
Faculty of Education Student Handbooks
University Senate Documents

Two Year Bachelor of Education Document Review. For 9 out of 12 faculties of education, Senate approved documents were found online for Ontario's new two year BEd programs. For those faculties of education where Senate approved documents could not be found, documents such as those listed in Table 3 relating to new BEd programs were searched. Best efforts were made to compare current and proposed BEd programs at Laurentian University, Trent University, and the University of Ottawa. However, several new BEd course lists and descriptions were not yet published or available on faculty of education websites. See Table 4 for the universities included in each component of the document reviews and the number of documents reviewed for each institution.

Table 4

Number of Documents Reviewed by University

University	One Year BEd Program	Two Year BEd Program
Brock University	4	4
Lakehead University	3	3
Laurentian University*	3	3
Nipissing University	3	3
Queen's University	3	3
Trent University*	3	3
University of Ontario Institute of Technology	3	3
University of Ottawa*	4	3
University of Windsor	3	3
Western University	3	4
Wilfrid Laurier University	4	3
York University	3	3

* Denotes Universities where Senate approved documents for modified two year BEd programs were absent at the time of review.

Instrument

An online survey in English (see Appendix A) consisting of 12 questions was designed by the researcher and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey questions addressed inclusion of parent engagement pedagogy in their existing BEd programs, knowledge of current provincial policy on parent engagement, knowledge of new OCT accreditation resource guidelines for parent engagement and communication, and how faculties of education

plan on implementing the guidelines into the new two year BEd programs. Demographics such as gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status were not included. No questions were asked that could personally identify participants. To further protect the identity of respondents, those faculties of education that participated in the survey are not revealed.

A variety of question types were adapted from Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (2005). The questionnaire included options for written answers and yes and no type questions. Each question also included a decline to answer option. Rating and agreement questions used a five point Likert scale (Creswell, 2013, 2006). For example, participants were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree parent engagement and communication is integrated across the preservice curriculum, with 1 representing “not at all” through to 5 representing “a lot”. The questionnaire was distributed to participants via the internet through the online service, Survey Monkey. The data from the survey was collected electronically by Survey Monkey and then forwarded to the researcher (Survey Monkey, 2013, September 9, retrieved from <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/>). Once collected, the survey results would have been entered into the statistic software program, SPSS, for data analysis and descriptive statistics. However, limited data were received and a manual comparison of results was found to be sufficient.

Procedures

Survey. The Deans of Education were first introduced to the research through the Acting Dean at the faculty of education at Wilfrid Laurier University, Dr. Dawn Buzza, at the monthly Ontario Association for Deans of Education meeting in May, 2014. Following the verbal invitation by Dr. Buzza, the Deans received email invitations (see Appendix C) to participate in

the survey. Email invitations were in the form of a covering letter and Deans were asked to forward the invitation to key faculty of education members who were engaged in the development of the new two year Bachelor of Education degree. Deans could opt to participate if they chose to do so and institutions could have one or more faculty of education member complete the survey.

A direct link to the online survey was included and prominently displayed in the email. When participants accessed the link online, they were taken to the front page of the survey where they were instructed to read and give their electronic informed consent (see Appendix D) prior to beginning the survey. Participants could decline to participate at any time. Participants could choose to participate in the online survey alone (option 1), agree to participate in both the online survey and telephone interview (option 2), or decline to participate in the research (option 3). A separate check box allowed participants to decline having their written answers quoted in the final research report. If participants declined to have their written responses quoted, they could still participate in the survey, or both the survey and telephone interview, without penalty.

After the original email, a second request to participate in the online survey was emailed to the Deans of Education. Email addresses were accessed through publically available university websites. Following a low survey response rate, the Associate Deans of Education were approached to participate in the online survey. Systematic email invitations in the form of a covering letter were sent to 10 Associate Deans of Education. Email addresses were accessed through publically available university websites. The online survey remained accessible for an extended period of time totaling six months to accommodate the additional participation of the Associate Deans of Education. After a six month duration, the online survey was disabled and removed from Survey Monkey.

The data from the survey was collected electronically by Survey Monkey and then forwarded to the researcher. Data was password protected and the security protocol, secure sockets layer (SSL) electronic encryption was used for the transfer of data between Survey Monkey and the researcher. Internet protocol (IP) addresses were masked to protect the online identity of the participants (Survey Monkey, 2013, September 9, retrieved from <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/>). Each set of survey answers was randomly assigned S1, S2, S3, etc., through to the number of survey answer sets received, representing survey (S) participant set 1, survey participant set 2, survey participant set 3, etc.

Document Review. Document reviews (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte, 2000) for the 12 faculties of education identified in the participant section of this chapter were conducted. All documents related to one and two year Bachelor of Education programs were included, such as program information and descriptions, program progression, brochures and student handbooks. For all 12 faculties of education, document reviews of full course descriptions, where available on faculty of education and university websites, were conducted. The rationale was to search and review all documents that might reference parent engagement related pedagogy in any context. Table 3 lists the variety of documents that were used in document reviews.

University Senate documents were only used in the review of modified two year BEd programs. All reviewed documents were accessed via university and faculty of education websites. Data collection and document reviews for one year BEd programs were conducted between January 6th and March 20th, 2014. Data collection and document reviews for the two year BEd programs were conducted between October 8th and December 19th, 2014,

The following seven key root word searches (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte, 2000) were used to identify content that included pedagogy specifically related to parent engagement: parent,

famil, involvement, engagement, partner, collaborat, communit. The root word searches were conducted to identify those words that might potentially be related to parent engagement. Further examination of the contexts within which those words were found aided in determining specific parent engagement pedagogy. English root words were translated into French using Google translate and French Bachelor of Education program documents were searched.

In using these root words, the search results were able to capture all related words. For example, the search for “collaborat” found all related words including collaborate, collaboration and collaborative, while the root word search “partner” found related words such as partners, partnership and partnerships. Irrelevant word search results, such as transparent for the root word search “parent” and familiarize for the root word search “famil” were omitted from the document review. References to parent engagement pedagogy in existing teacher education programs were recorded to provide a basis for comparison against newly revised BEd programs.

Root word searches were also conducted on all Senate approved documents submitted by faculties of education for their respective new two year BEd programs. Search results for each new BEd program were recorded and the content was further scrutinized for specific relevance and reference to parent engagement pedagogy. The contexts within which parent engagement related pedagogy was found, were then reviewed for any similarities or emerging themes.

Faculty of education websites were reviewed for any updated BEd program information, such as new course outlines or descriptions, that might be related to parent engagement pedagogy and that might have been omitted in Senate documents. A comparison analysis (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte, 2000) of one and two year BEd programs for each faculty of education was then conducted to examine the degree of modification to preservice teacher education programs regarding parent engagement pedagogy.

Chapter 5

Results

A convenience sample of $n = 13$ faculties of education were invited via email to participate in this research. A total of $n = 2$ participants completed the survey and $n = 0$ participants agreed to a follow up interview. The survey consisted of 12 questions that addressed inclusion of parent engagement pedagogy in existing teacher education programs, knowledge of provincial parent engagement policy, knowledge of new OCT accredited guidelines, and finally, how faculties of education planned on implementing new OCT guidelines pertaining to parent engagement and communication.

A document review was conducted on one year BEd programs and on Senate approved documents regarding modified two year BEd programs. Systematic root word searches were conducted on all documents. The results were then compared to identify any changes to parent engagement related pedagogy in preservice teacher education programs.

Survey Results

Of the 13 faculties of education that were invited to participate, only two completed surveys and one incomplete survey were received over a six month period. Of the completed surveys, neither participant agreed to a follow up telephone interview. With only two sets of data, analysis was limited to each response.

When asked to what degree the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) accreditation resource guide was used to help modify their current BEd program to the new two year BEd program (Question # 2), one participant reported that they used the resource guide quite a bit (S2) while the other participant reported that they did not use the resource guide very much (S1). In having used the accreditation resource guide quite a bit, one participant provided an optional

comment, reporting that, “we had a basic plan but waited till the resource guide was finalized before deciding what was in the courses. . .” (S2).

One participant reported having made major modification to their current BEd program (Question # 3; S1) while the other participant reported that the degree of modification to their current BEd program was somewhat minor (S2). Upon optional elaboration, one participant said:

We already had the equivalent of more than 50 credits and 90 days of practicum. But some of the courses and practicum had no credit value attached to them. Now all courses, workshops, and practicum experiences are being tallied, and we have added about 6 new half courses and lengthened some other courses (S2).

Neither participant reported that their institution previously offered a standalone course on parent engagement (Question # 4), nor will their institution be offering a standalone course on parent engagement in their new two year BEd program (Question # 5; S1, S2).

When asked to look specifically at their current BEd program and rate the degree to which parent engagement is integrated across preservice teacher education (Question # 6), one participant reported that parent engagement is somewhat integrated (S1) while the other participant reported that there is not very much integration of parent engagement across preservice teacher education (S2).

Looking ahead to their new two year BEd program (Question # 7), one participant reported that parent engagement is somewhat integrated across preservice teacher education (S1) while the other participant reported that there is not very much integration of parent engagement across preservice teacher education (S2). Providing optional elaboration, one participant reported that, “we now have a course that includes parental engagement as a specific component. Our methods courses also include a section on parent’s nights etc.” (S2).

When asked to compare their current BEd program with their new two year BEd program, both participants reported that the content of parent engagement pedagogy has somewhat increased (Question # 8; S1, S2).

One participant responded that they felt their faculty of education was not very familiar with Ontario's 2010 Parent Engagement Policy (Question # 9; S2) while the other participant declined to answer (S1). To the best of their knowledge, participants were asked if Ontario's 2010 Parent Engagement Policy was consulted in the modification of their BEd program (Question # 10). One participant said yes (S2) while the other participant said no (S1).

Ontario regulation 283/13 (Amending O. Reg. 347/02, Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs, approved October 2013) requires that teacher education programs include how to create and maintain the various types of professional relationships between and among members of the College, students, parents, the community, school staff and member of other professions (Regulation 283/13, Schedule 1, The Teaching Context Knowledge, para 6). Participants were asked to describe how their faculty of education is addressing this requirement in their new teacher education programs (Question # 11). One participant responded that, "it will be specifically addressed in one course in the final year" (S2). The other participant declined to have their written answers quoted in the final research report.

On a scale of 1 to 5, participants were asked how much they think their faculty of education's new two year BEd program will better prepare teacher candidates to engage parents (Question # 12). One participant responded with a 4; that they think their new program will better prepare teacher candidates to engage parents by quite a bit (S1). The other participant answered with a 3; that they think their new program will somewhat better prepare teacher candidates (S2). One participant provided optional elaboration:

There are many elements that must be added to the expanded B.Ed. and this is just one component. Also, in my experience, for B.Ed. candidates – who are looking at a pretty bleak domestic job market – this component stands pretty far off in the future in a way. As educators we know that adult students are most concerned with practical concerns immediately applicable to their situation. At best, however, most of our candidates are hoping to get some supply work, or more likely go overseas after they graduate, so the particulars of dealing with parents in the Ontario context is something that most probably won't face immediately. And they know that (S2).

Document Review

One Year Bachelor of Education Degree Programs

Search results found that two faculties of education, Brock University and the University of Ottawa, offered standalone courses specific to parent engagement in their consecutive, one year BEd programs. The standalone courses were designated as elective courses and therefore were not required elements for all teacher candidates. Brock University offered an elective course called Family Literacy and Parent Involvement in Education, EDUC 8P40. This elective course investigated school practices for family literacy development and helped students design practical, school-based strategies for parent involvement (Brock University, 2014, March 13).

Working collaboratively with other departments, the teacher education program at Brock University granted permission for teacher candidates to take elective courses from other disciplines. For example, as part of its Honours Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECE) undergraduate program, Brock University offered a cross-elective course called Family, Schools and Literacy, EDUC 3P40. This course discussed research, issues, and strategies for home and school collaboration in family literacy, literacy development and parental involvement in

education (Brock University, 2013, April 2). This undergraduate course was available to students from other disciplines, including the consecutive BEd Primary/Junior division program, the Honours Child and Youth Studies (CHYS) program, and the Certificate in Educational Studies programs.

The University of Ottawa offered a French elective course called *École Famille et Communauté*, PED 3705. This elective course addressed the contributions of and the relationships between school, family, the community and students within a francophone minority context (University of Ottawa, 2012, March). Like Brock University, this elective course was also offered to other undergraduate students in related disciplines.

Aside from the standalone, cross-elective courses offered at Brock University and the University of Ottawa, there was limited reference or evidence of parent engagement related pedagogy within the remaining one year BEd programs. Further examination of program descriptions and course content across the remaining faculties of education found that parents were most often mentioned within course descriptions as topics that may be included during instruction. For example, in a classroom dynamics course offered at Brock University, “topics may include motivation, social contexts of learning, individual differences, student thinking and problem solving, family, school, community partnerships” (Brock University, 2014, March 13). That is, as part of a sub-topic or sub-category within a greater pedagogical context, preservice teacher candidates may have the opportunity to learn about family, school and community partnerships.

From the examination of program descriptions and course content across the remaining faculties of education, three themes emerged from the contexts within which parent engagement

related pedagogy was included in preservice teacher education. These categories are communication, exceptional students, and school activities.

The most common reference to parents was found within the context of learning outcomes or expectations; specifically, that teacher candidates were expected to effectively communicate student learning with parents. The expectation to effectively communicate with parents was cited predominantly in reference to parent-teacher interviews. For example, a core curriculum methods course offered by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, states that:

This course is an overview of approaches to teaching and learning in Grades 7-12 with specific emphasis on planning (year long, unit and lesson plans) and communication techniques (parent-teacher interviews, verbal and nonverbal communication) for all I/S BEd teacher candidates (University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2012).

The second most common reference to parents was found within the greater context of exceptional students. This included, for example, teacher education courses relating to special or gifted education, English Language Learners (ELLs), mental health education, or Aboriginal education. Within special education, when an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) identifies a student as exceptional and subsequently, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is required, it is mandated by Ontario's Education Act that parents be consulted in collaboration to better meet the needs of the student. This Provincial regulation helps to explain why parents are most frequently mentioned within the context of exceptional students. An illustration of this can be found in the objectives of a teaching exceptional students course at Lakehead University, whereby teacher candidates are:

to develop an appreciation of the skills necessary in collaborating with the special needs student, their families, consultants, other teachers and the other professionals working to enhance the special needs student's level of academic and social function and enjoyment at school (Lakehead University, 2012a).

The remaining references to parent engagement related pedagogy in preservice teacher education programs were found within the context of school events and activities. Several faculties of education, in their general methods or foundation courses, mentioned ways for teacher candidates to include parents in their children's learning. This expectation for teacher candidates was frequently mentioned in conjunction with the expectation to effectively communicate with parents. Parents' attendance on class or school field trips, attendance at parent-teacher conferences, sending newsletters home, or participating in other school events, such as Parent ESL (English as a Second Language) nights, were all cited as examples of ways to include parents in their children's learning.

Two Year Bachelor of Education Degree Programs

Examination of root word search results and their specific relevance to parent engagement pedagogy found that the majority of references were either related to teacher candidates' learning or to student learning. For example, although York University's search results found many references to community, partnership and engagement, those references were found within the contexts of building a classroom community, developing and participating in learning communities, strategies for critical engagement, student learning engagement, and partnerships with school boards or other partnering faculties of education.

Another example comes from the University of Windsor. With a teacher education program focused on social justice and equity, search results from their new BEd program found

extensive references to collaboration with the community and facilitating teacher candidate's involvement in activities outside the classroom. However, very few of these references were specifically related to parent engagement related pedagogy.

From further review of new BEd program descriptions and course content, two themes emerged from the contexts within which parent engagement pedagogy was found. Similar to the one year BEd content and document analyses, references relevant to parent engagement pedagogy were most frequently found within the contexts of communicating student learning to parents and teaching exceptional students.

For example, search results for Wilfrid Laurier Universities' new BEd program found that parents were most often mentioned in reference to communication with parents. One of the strengths of Wilfrid Laurier's revised BEd program, that will facilitate greater alignment with the university's academic plan, is that teacher candidates, "are continuously engaged in communicating and performing as they teach and as they interact with educators, staff, students and parents." (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2014, March 3, p. 6). Furthermore, improved learning outcomes for student assessment will ensure that teacher candidates, "conduct ongoing assessment of pupils' progress, make data-informed decisions for differentiated instruction, evaluate student achievement and regularly communicate results to students and parents/guardians" (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2014, March 3, p. 7).

The expanded teacher education programs at both the University of Windsor and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, showed an increased emphasis on communication as it pertains to professional relationships. Modifications to the contextual knowledge portion of BEd programs and to learning outcomes, require that teacher candidates demonstrate knowledge of professional relationships, including communicating and engaging with teachers, school staff,

students, parents, and the community (University of Windsor, 2014, January 23, p. 4). In addition, teacher candidates will, “design and teach effective strategies and engage in respectful and professional relationships and interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and other community members” (University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2014, February, p. 8).

A second theme to emerge from document reviews of expanded teacher education programs was the frequency of references to parents within the context of exceptional students. Revised elements of Queen’s University’s teaching context knowledge framework include, “educating students of a program of professional education in child, youth and parental mental health issues relevant to the elementary and secondary school environment in Ontario” (Queen’s University, 2014, March 25, p. 36). Such references to parents remain in line with, for example, special education policy mandating the inclusion of parents in the development of education plans for exceptional students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

A first year level course that will be offered to teacher candidates at Brock University also references relationships with parents, but within the context of exceptional students. Topics of study in a course for teaching exceptional learners include communication exceptionality, learning disabilities, physical and multiple exceptionalities, relationships with parents and peers, and sociocultural diversity and ethnicity (Brock University, 2014, January 17).

A revision to Lakehead University’s BEd program included greater alignment of teacher candidate outcomes with degree level expectations. Here, references to parents were also found within the greater context of exceptional students. A learning outcome from the depth of knowledge element of the program, is for teacher candidates are to acquire, “knowledge about cultures of bullying, prejudice, and discrimination that gender and sexuality minority school students, teachers, and families (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) face in schools”

(Lakehead University, 2014, January 27, p. 10). Furthermore, and in line with degree level expectations, teacher candidates are required to, “demonstrate an understanding of child, youth and parent mental health and the requisite knowledge to link school students and families to services” (Lakehead University, 2014, January 27, p. 11).

Beyond the contexts of exceptional students and communicating with parents, including professional relationships with parents, there appears to be limited references to parent engagement related pedagogy in new preservice teacher education programs in Ontario. However, search results did find one additional faculty of education that will be offering a standalone, elective course specific to parent engagement pedagogy in the fall of 2015. Nipissing University joins Brock University and the University of Ottawa in offering a standalone, elective course on parent and family engagement. Although search results found that Lakehead University will be offering an undergraduate course called Aboriginal Parents, Families and Communities, EDUC 3130, this course is restricted to students of Aboriginal ancestry enrolled in the Honours Bachelor of Aboriginal Education program (HBEd). Furthermore, the HBED program is a concurrent, rather than a consecutive, preservice teacher education program that has recently increased from a four year program to a five year program.

Nipissing University will be offering a new course called Family-School Partnerships: Bridging the Gap Between Home and School Literacies, EDUC 4722. Although the focus of this course appears to be on language and literacy, it offers teacher candidates the most in-depth pedagogy on parent engagement, family and school partnerships, the strengths of diverse families, and practical strategies to engage and empower families. Table 5 illustrates this new course that will be available to preservice teacher candidates in the fall of 2015.

Table 5

Family-School Partnerships: Bridging the Gap Between Home and School Literacies (Nipissing University, 2013)

Family – School Partnerships: Bridging the Gap Between Home and School Literacies	
Course Description	<p>Recognizing families as the first educators of their children and homes as rich sources of language and literacy, teacher candidates explore strengths and needs of diverse families and family-school partnerships that enhance student achievement and well-being. Candidates interrogate beliefs, preconceptions, and assumptions that underlie parent engagement practices and policies in order to interrupt potential power imbalances and develop meaningful, practical, and empowering ways to engage, support, and empower families from school entry to graduation.</p>
Learning Expectations/Outcomes	<p>Teacher candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand factors (e.g., familial, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, educational, attitudinal) influencing parent engagement and how these relate to student achievement and well-being; • review and interrogate personal beliefs, preconceptions, assumptions, and experiences related to family involvement and/or engagement and how these relate to student achievement and well-being; • understand the critical importance and role of families and caregivers in early learning and ongoing student learning from school entry to graduation; • demonstrate familiarity with family literacy resources, trends, and practices in schools, community agencies, family literacy organizations, etc.; • develop and document through collaborative inquiry meaningful, practical, and empowering ways, grounded in theory and practice, to engage, support, and empower families; • become familiar with Ontario Ministry of Education policy documents.

Overall results showed that the degree of modification to BEd programming varied between somewhat minor to major. The degree of consultation of OCT guidelines varied between not very much to quite a bit. Participants reported that the integration of parent engagement pedagogy across teacher education programming was somewhat to not very much integrated. However, participants reported that parent engagement pedagogy had somewhat increased in their modified BEd programs and felt that teacher candidates would be somewhat to quite a bit better prepared to engage parents.

Aside from standalone but optional courses, limited references to parent engagement pedagogy were found in both existing and modified teacher education programs. The majority of references to parents were found within the contexts of communicating student learning to parents and teaching exceptional students. In the final chapter following, I will be discussing these research findings and their implications for preservice teacher education programs in Ontario.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Parent engagement is the process of relationship building, based upon reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust that facilitates greater parent-teacher collaboration in support of student success. Parents are an integral and essential part of a process that enables “parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers’ knowledge” (Pushor, 2007, p. 3). Parent engagement embraces the core beliefs that all parents want the best for their children and that all parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Parent engagement requires strong communication skills. Parent engagement utilizes many strategies, for example, to create a welcoming climate for students and their parents, to develop relationships with parents, to link classroom learning to home learning that increases parents’ confidence to support their child’s learning at home, and to build social capital for students, their parents, and their families.

Throughout previous, one year preservice teacher education programs in Ontario, references to parent engagement pedagogy were frequently found within course descriptions as topics that may be included in instruction. Exceptions included two standalone, cross-elective courses taught in English at Brock University and one standalone, cross-elective course taught in French at the University of Ottawa. All other references to parent engagement related pedagogy were found within the contexts of communicating with parents, teaching exceptional students, and participation in school activities.

In response to new OCT accreditation guidelines, references to parent engagement pedagogy in modified preservice teacher education programs have somewhat increased. These

findings are consistent with two survey results where participants, when asked to compare their current and future BEd programs, reported the content of their parent engagement pedagogy had somewhat increased. These moderate results are concurrent with recent OCT recommendations that new two year teacher education programs offer increased opportunities for teacher candidates to acquire knowledge and skills relating to parent engagement and communication (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014).

References to parents in modified preservice teacher education programs were also found within the contexts of communicating with parents and teaching exceptional students; however, there appeared to be a slight increase in the emphasis on developing professional relationships. It is promising to see a shift away from the traditional framework where references to parents are synonymous with participation in school-based and school related activities, such as volunteering in the classroom. As the expert model demonstrates, participation in these types of activities reflects traditional views of parent involvement that serve the needs of the school and does not facilitate meaningful engagement with parents (Pushor, 2007).

Furthermore, a greater emphasis on developing productive relationships with parents suggests a response in preservice teacher education programs to promote “relationships built on a foundation of partnership and cooperation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.28). These results are consistent with OCT accreditation guidelines requiring new programs include how to create and maintain a variety of professional relationships along with the skills necessary to developing respectful, reciprocal relationships with parents and families (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014).

The most promising evidence of parent engagement pedagogy found in modified BEd programs was a new standalone, elective course being offered at Nipissing University. This is an

increase from existing preservice teacher education programs, as 3 out of 12 faculties of education will now be offering standalone, elective courses on parent and family engagement pedagogy in the fall of 2015. The development of this literacy-based course on family-school partnerships demonstrates the most comprehensive integration of OCT accreditation requirements within an expanded teacher education program. The learning outcomes listed in Table 5 reflect the core competencies teacher candidates are expected to acquire during preservice teacher education. Recall that the knowledge and skills required of new BEd programs in Ontario, as outlined by the Ontario College of Teachers, include:

- The shared interest of schools, families and community in student well-being, learning and development
- The positive ways in which families can contribute to each student's learning
- Developing positive reciprocal relationships with families, individually and collectively
- The importance of shared high expectations
- Seeking help to understand and help address barriers that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning
- Proactive and positive communication with parents and caregivers

Moreover, the learning expectations of this new course include the development of meaningful and practical ways to support, engage and empower families; a practical element of parent engagement that is missing from OCT accreditation guidelines. As outlined by the OCT, expanded preservice teacher education programs are only required to demonstrate that teacher candidates have had the opportunity to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills. If practical

opportunities should arise, teacher candidates are only required to observe, and at best, engage in practicum reflection (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014).

It is difficult to understand how teacher candidates are to acquire the skills and strategies of effective parent engagement, such as developing productive relationships and demonstrating proactive and positive communication, without clear, detailed explanations of what exactly each encompasses, and furthermore, without any opportunity for practical experience. Thus, the challenge remains for preservice teacher education programs to not only prepare teacher candidates to understand the current research and benefits of parent engagement, but to also provide them with opportunities to practice strategies that are known to be effective in engaging parents in ways that facilitate positive student outcomes (Epstein, 2013).

Nipissing University's new family-school partnerships course represents a positive move towards greater parent engagement pedagogy in preservice teacher education programs in Ontario. Unfortunately, elective parent engagement courses are not required courses within preservice teacher education programs. In addition, the design and implementation of standalone courses is at the discretion of individual faculties of education. As long as faculties of education incorporate parent engagement and communication discourse somewhere within their new BEd programs, they will be fulfilling OCT accreditation guidelines. That is, programs need only demonstrate that teacher candidates have had the opportunity to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills through instruction and observation, but not through integrated practical approaches.

It is important to acknowledge that expanded parent engagement and communication requirements set by the Ontario College of Teachers is a positive move towards growing the strength of Ontario's teacher education programs. However, the implementation of OCT accreditation guidelines is at the discretion of individual faculties of education. With only 3 out

of 12 faculties of education offering standalone parent engagement elective courses, the opportunity for teacher candidates to receive parent engagement pedagogy and practice varies greatly from program to program. The differences found between programs is congruent with survey results where participants reported that parent engagement pedagogy in new BEd programs was somewhat, to not very much integrated across preservice teacher education.

One participant (S2) felt they had consulted Ontario's 2010 Parent Engagement Policy to help in the modification of their BEd program, but the other participant (S1) felt they had not. Furthermore, while one participant (S1) felt they did not use OCT accreditation guidelines very much but made major modification to their BEd program, the other participant (S2) felt they had used the guidelines quite a bit but made somewhat minor revisions to their program. The use and implementation of OCT guidelines appears to be quite different for each new BEd program.

A potential issue that arises is that there is a lack of consistency in exposure to parent engagement pedagogy and practice in preservice teacher education programs in Ontario. Teacher candidates enrolled at Nipissing University, Brock University, or the University of Ottawa commencing in the fall of 2015, have the opportunity to take an elective course dedicated to parent and family engagement pedagogy. It is optional whether teacher candidates take this course or not. Elsewhere, teacher candidates will have to rely upon the parent engagement pedagogy that is provided within their program to help prepare them to effectively work with parents. As such, it appears there are inconsistent and limited opportunities for teacher candidates to gain the competence and skills they need to be able to effectively work with parents, before they enter the classroom.

This is reiterated by one participant's (S2) comment that teacher candidates are more concerned about the immediate practical issues applicable to their situation. Dealing with

parents, according to one participant (S2), is something most teacher candidates in Ontario will not have to immediately face. This perspective gives the impression that learning to deal with parents is not an immediate priority for new teachers in Ontario and that it can be dealt with farther off in the future.

Yet, as stated previously, this is precisely why learning to effectively engage parents needs to be a priority in preservice teacher education (Baum & McMurray –Schwarz, 2004; Evans, 2013; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Lopez & Patton, 2013; Patte, 2011; Patton & Wanless, 2013; Uludag, 2008). If not in preservice education, when will teacher candidates have the opportunity to develop a foundation of competency and skills that will better enable them to effectively work with parents? Survey results from New Teacher Induction Programs in Ontario show that beginning teachers receive the least amount of assistance from their mentors and other experienced teachers on effective parent communication (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). The challenges of waiting until later to teach new teachers about parent engagement include limited availability of relevant professional development, lack of funding for in-service training, and school climate or leadership where support for parent engagement might be low. Waiting until after new teachers enter the classroom is too late.

Only 2 out of 13 faculties of education responded to the survey and neither participant agreed to a telephone interview. Only 9 out of 12 faculty of education Senate documents could be found online regarding modifications to BEd programming. The lack of data and evidence in this research may be a result of timing as search results for this research ceased in December 2014, and new BEd programs are not due to begin until September 2015. The issue of timing may also explain why several faculties of education have yet to publish new course descriptions, and in some situations, new program requirements.

Limited references to parent engagement related pedagogy in modified teacher education programs were found within the contexts of communicating student learning to parents, and to seeking collaboration with parents of exceptional students. Communicating student learning to parents, via newsletters or parent-teacher interviews, can be perceived as forms of one-way communication. As Crozier and Davies (2007) describe, one-way communication can demonstrate a compliance discourse, and can unintentionally send the message that schools are not truly prepared to listen to or hear from parents.

One possible explanation for this is that communicating student learning to parents, for example, through Provincial Elementary and Secondary Report Cards or parent-teacher interviews, is mandated by the Ministry of Education. It is also a Provincial requirement to include parents in the development of an Individual Education Plan for an exceptional student. Perhaps mandated legislation provides some explanation as to why parents are mentioned within limiting contexts across preservice teacher education programs. Some of these contexts remain consistent with the literature on traditional views of parent involvement that serve the needs of the school, such as required parent-teacher interviews. Another example is communicating student learning to parents via report cards that are sent home with students, which can be misconstrued as a form of one-way communication.

Furthermore, as outlined by Pushor (2007) and Kozak (2009), traditional views of parent involvement can become a narrow script, or an agenda, that educators ask or expect parents to do in support of the structure and function of school routines. Recall in chapter two how these scripted roles reinforce the idea that there are professional boundaries between home and school, with school becoming the expert model that holds the valued knowledge, power and authority to

make decisions about educational matters (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Moss, 2001; Pushor, 2007; Pushor, 2012).

Within the expert model, traditional views of parent involvement are perpetuated, rather than parent engagement. These views serve the needs of schools and do not facilitate meaningful engagement with parents (Pushor, 2007). Thus, the challenge for preservice teacher education programs in Ontario is to provide the education and training necessary to enable teacher candidates to move:

beyond this perception of parents as volunteers to the more appropriate view of parents as an integral part of their child's development and learning. Parents should be involved in ways that are not only beneficial for teachers but also in ways that are meaningful and relevant to both the children and their parents (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004, p. 60).

The cultural interference model presented earlier by Crozier and Davies (2007) may provide another explanation for why there is a lack of integration of parent engagement pedagogy across preservice teacher education programs. Parents are markedly missing from expanded BEd programming involving equity, diversity, and social justice courses, courses on creating safe schools, multicultural, global and international education courses, and courses with a focus on urban schools, poverty and at-risk students. These are all highly relevant contexts where parents play a critical role in their child's education. However, racialized patterns and cultural assumptions that persist in teacher education programs may unintentionally undermine parent engagement efforts.

To illustrate, recall the cultural assumption described by Crozier and Davies (2007) that minority parents do not value education, and therefore, if students do not do well, it is the fault of

the parents. In a teacher education course offered at Lakehead University, *Teaching in Multicultural Settings*, one of the learning objectives points to the fault of parents for academic failure. That is, teacher candidates are:

To develop a strong belief in children's strengths and intelligence and not to attribute school failure to individual deficiencies on the part of lazy, apathetic, and intellectually inferior underclass of students or to uncaring or selfish parents (Lakehead University, 2012b, retrieved from <http://vaugeois.info/academic/EDUC%203237.pdf>).

Although candidates are required to understand that a student's failure is not to be attributed to a particular underclass or to the fault of uncaring or selfish parents, the cultural assumptions, stereotypes and negative attitudes towards parents is evident. While recognizing and addressing racialized patterns for a student's school failure in a culturally situated and sensitive way, parents, it seems, are not afforded the same recognition.

This cultural interference becomes a barrier that potentially sends the message that parents, and the role they play in their child's education, are not valued. Subsequently, well-intentioned efforts on behalf of faculties of education to integrate meaningful parent engagement pedagogy into preservice teacher education programs may be undermined. As Pushor (2007) argues, the omission of parent engagement pedagogy across these contexts can marginalize parents and take for granted the diverse and meaningful ways they can positively contribute to their child's education. When parents' diverse perspectives and valued roles in their children's learning are omitted, there is little opportunity for teacher candidates to recognize parents as partners in education or the vital contributions parents can make towards improved student outcomes and overall well-being (Kozak, 2009; Pushor, 2007).

The omission of parents across diverse contexts within preservice teacher education runs contrary to provincial legislation that promotes the integration of parent engagement pedagogy, for example, in its Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) and with the Accepting Schools Act (2012a). It also runs contrary to new OCT accreditation requisites for teacher candidates to understand the diverse strengths of students and their families and the positive ways in which families can contribute to student learning. This further highlights the gap between policy and teacher expectations related to parent engagement, and the training teacher candidates receive.

As the research has shown, parents working together in partnership with schools and community organizations provide the greatest opportunity for improved student outcomes, especially for at-risk students (CADRE, 2002; Child Trends, 2014a; Weiss et al., 2010). Partnership models in education, such as Child and Family Teams (CFTs) and Integrated Student Supports (ISS), can be founded within the theoretical framework of social capital theory. Recall that the essence of social capital is the value that is found within social networks, or relationships. Relationships are the foundation of parent engagement and social capital theory. Having meaningful connections with others can provide many positive social, emotional, physical and economic benefits (Dufur et al., 2013; Parcel & Pennell, 2012).

Take for example a student who may be struggling in school. The stronger his or her social capital, or network of relationships, the greater that student's access to resources and support, and ultimately, the chance to realize their potential. Like partnership models in education, we can see social capital theory in practice through whole child and community school approaches and other home-school-community partnership efforts to address issues

relating to poverty, at-risk students, and achievement gaps (Child Trends, 2014a; 2014b; Dufur et al., 2013; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss et al., 2010).

The emerging research continues to show that developing social capital at home and at school, aimed at extending networks of relationships and access to resources, has many positive outcomes for students, parents, teachers, schools and communities. Furthermore, home-school-community partnership models in education have been shown to have a greater impact on school and student outcomes than traditional acts of parent involvement. That is, the research shows that while parent involvement is important in supporting the structures and functions of school routines, it is the process of parent engagement, or the building of relationships and partnerships, that provides the greatest opportunities for improved student outcomes.

This points to the benefits of preservice teacher education programs encouraging not only greater parent engagement in support of children's learning, but to the increased capacity for building social capital through home-school-community partnerships (Child Trends, 2014; Parcel & Pennell, 2012; Weiss & Stephen, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010). It would be advantageous, then, for faculties of education to continue to integrate parent engagement pedagogy and practice into BEd programming that reflects the most current evidence-based research and that challenges traditional perspectives.

Overall, how faculties of education plan to implement new OCT accreditation guidelines for parent engagement into modified BEd programs demonstrates a consistency with the literature on traditional parental involvement perspectives, rather than on parent engagement. Despite a slight increase in the emphasis on professional relationships, the majority of references to parents remain within the limited contexts of effectively communicating student learning to parents and exceptional students. These themes are congruent with Ministry requirements and

provide a potential explanation as to why references to parents are most frequently found within these contexts.

Although survey participants reported their parent engagement pedagogy had somewhat increased, there remains a gap between Ontario policy expectations, OCT requisites, and the training new teacher candidates will receive. This is supported by a lack of integration and consistency in exposure to parent engagement pedagogy, in addition to a lack of opportunity for practical experience found in new teacher education programs.

These findings bring to light some of the challenges in addressing parent engagement in preservice teacher education programs. As Uludag (2008) argues, this can potentially send the message that parent engagement is unimportant or not a priority. However, it would be inaccurate to conclude that faculties of education do not care about parent engagement. There are several influential factors and issues that may help explain these findings.

First and foremost would be the lack of research data in this study. There were only two completed surveys received and no telephone interview data. Additionally, only published documents were reviewed. That is, parent engagement pedagogy and practice that may take place within the classroom, for example, but not published in course listings, is excluded and therefore, does not fully represent the training teacher candidates might receive.

As mentioned previously, time may also have been a factor. Data collection and document reviews took place during 2014 while new two year BEd programs do not commence until the fall of 2015. Furthermore, some faculties of education may have been undergoing restructuring and faculty staff changes during this timeframe, as supported by the closure and suspension of some teacher education programs.

Another factor that may have contributed to these findings is the extensive content and curriculum requirements of preservice teacher education programs in Ontario. New OCT requisites for parent engagement and communication represents just one component of many elements to be incorporated into modified programs. Thus, it can be challenging for faculties of education to find instructional staff who have the knowledge, expertise and experience to fulfill all provincial policy and OCT requisites on parent engagement.

The importance of the research findings is that it contributes to a better understanding of parent engagement pedagogy and practice in new preservice teacher education programs in Ontario and situates it within the extant literature. That is, it provides insight into the development of new teacher education programming that has yet to challenge traditional parental involvement perspectives with more current, evidence-based research on parent engagement. The implication is that the research findings may better inform new teacher education programs as well as potential future modifications to preservice teacher education programs in Ontario.

With an eye towards growing the strength of Ontario's teacher education programs and to better inform BEd programs on effective parent engagement pedagogy and practice, a key recommendation would be to collaborate with Nipissing University on the evaluation of their new course on family-school partnerships. Collaborative partnerships with Brock University and the University of Ottawa on the evaluation of the effectiveness of their elective courses to better prepare teacher candidates for parent engagement, would be another key recommendation.

For example, teacher candidates entering the new two year BEd program could be surveyed and interviewed at the beginning and at the end of their studies for their perspectives and self-efficacy to engage parents. In addition, teacher candidates who opt to take an elective course on parent engagement could be surveyed and interviewed at both the beginning and end

of the course. Such research would not only provide evaluative insight but could possibly contribute to the existing literature that shows promise in enhanced curricula as a strategy to better prepare new teachers for parent engagement.

Another way forward would be for more faculties of education to design, develop and implement their own parent engagement courses. Three key components to the design of a parent engagement course have been identified by the researcher. They include a pedagogical component grounded in evidence-based research, a reflective component to address barriers and assumptions, and a practical component for skill building and implementing strategies.

Topics within the research component could include why parent engagement matters, the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement, the benefits of parent engagement for all stakeholders, the critical role parents play in their child's education, the type of involvement that matters most in improved student outcomes, as well as teacher expectations and competencies for effective parent engagement. Theoretical frameworks such as social capital theory, community and whole child approaches, and the various partnership models in education would be studied.

One goal of an evidence-based research component in teacher education programs might be for candidates to not only understand current parent engagement research, but to also critically examine and explore the extant research. Primary readings, for example, would include all relevant Ministry of Education policy documents and Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies' (2007), *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*.

Within the reflective component, teacher candidates would have the opportunity to learn what the many barriers to parent engagement might be, explore the expert model in parent engagement discourse, challenge personal assumption and biases, and to unpack social locations

of privilege and power. Working through small group scenarios and case studies, for example, candidates would draw upon the many principles of diversity, equity and social justice to better understand the strengths and valued contributions of diverse parents and families.

An essential purpose of having a reflective component in teacher education programs is to address how assumptions, attitudes and biases can negatively impact student learning, school climate and culture, and meaningful relationships with parents and families. Safe, inclusive, co-created classroom guidelines would be necessary to support the sensitive, emotional, and personal impact that can result from challenging personal beliefs. An understanding of respect and trust as critical elements to overcoming barriers and building relationships would be paramount. Articles that would be good for teacher candidate reflection would be Crozier and Davies' (2007), *Hard to Reach Parents or Hard to Reach Schools?* and Pushor's (2012), *Tracing My Research on Parent Engagement: Working to Interrupt the Story of School as Protectorate*.

Finally, a practical component is a must for all teacher education programs so that candidates are given the opportunity to develop the competence and skills they need to effectively engage parents, before they enter the field. The associate or cooperating teacher that oversees practicums and field placements is a potential barrier identified by Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) that would need to be addressed. It is critical for faculties of education to clarify their expectations for teacher candidates to have practical opportunities to work with parents. Offering some basic suggestions based upon, for example, Nipissing's new family-school partnerships course, may facilitate greater opportunities for teacher candidates to practice their parent engagement skills. Practical opportunities during field placements would provide teacher candidates with real parent-teacher interaction experience.

Teacher candidates need the opportunity to put pedagogy into practice. Strong communication skills and relationship building strategies are necessary for effective parent engagement. Through active participation in role play scenarios, video simulation, and guest interactive-speakers, teacher candidates would have the opportunity to develop their listening, communication and interview skills. This would allow teacher candidates to practice, for example, a variety of techniques, approaches and responses to hard conversations with parents in a safe environment, without any undesirable consequences. Teacher candidates would develop effective outreach strategies, such as inviting parents to a welcoming celebration at the beginning of school and then creating frequent opportunities for parents and teachers to meet face-to-face throughout the year (Henderson et al., 2007).

Another example would be meeting with parents to listen to and give them the opportunity to share their aspirations for their child, or how they might like to be included in their child's learning (Henderson et al., 2007). Efforts to provide parents with ongoing, timely and relevant information about their child's learning might include the use of technology and social media, for example, but as a means to enhance, rather than replace, communication with parents.

Goals of incorporating a dedicated, practical component into preservice teacher education programs include promoting the capacity for meaningful relationship building and creating a foundation of self-efficacy for parent engagement that teachers could then build upon throughout their careers. Choice material and an excellent addition to any teacher education program would be the Parent, Family, Community Engagement (PFCE) Simulator, developed by The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. Another practical asset would be

resource videos from the Ministry of Ontario (2011), *Leadership Matters: Supporting Open-to Learning Conversations*.

There is strength in student, parent, and family diversity, and value in the many different ways parents can contribute to student learning. Respectively, a more comprehensive, integrated curriculum of parent engagement across preservice teacher education programs is recommended; programs that are grounded in evidence-based research and that comprise reflective and practical components. The implication is for faculties of education to develop teacher preparation programs that:

allow students ample time to not only learn basic information, but also time to grapple with their personal beliefs and practice, while applying their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a variety of settings (Baum & McMurray, 2004, p. 61).

Finally, it is advantageous for faculties of education to continue to make efforts to better align teacher competencies and expectations with those of current provincial policies that speak to parent engagement.

Limitations

The primary weakness of this research is that it lacks generalizability. As a convenience sample, the results are not representative of the general population (Creswell, 2013). The results of this research can only be used in the specific context of publically funded Ontario faculty of education programs for preservice teacher candidates. As such, this design has minimal internal validity and no external validity (Creswell, 2013, 2006).

All document reviews in this research were dependent upon and limited to the explicit listing of parent engagement related pedagogy in BEd course and program descriptions. The researcher acknowledges that although parent engagement related material may not have been

explicitly published in faculty of education documents, such content may very well have been addressed during, and across many preservice teacher education courses. Consequently, unlisted content that may have been addressed during class instruction, or content related to published documents after December 2014, are not addressed.

Future Research

Future research possibilities include collaborative partnerships with Brock University, Nipissing University, and the University of Ottawa on the effectiveness of their elective courses on parent engagement to better prepare new teachers to work with parents. This research would provide evaluative insight and may contribute to the existing literature that shows promise in an enhanced curriculum as a strategy to better prepare new teachers for parent engagement.

The evaluation of parent engagement pedagogy in Ontario's two year BEd programs along with efforts on behalf of faculties of education to better prepare teacher candidates to work with parents are additional future research possibilities. The implications of such research would contribute to a greater understanding of the effectiveness of preservice parent engagement pedagogy in Ontario. It is intended that the outcomes of my research better inform parent engagement pedagogy and practice across Ontario faculties of education.

I still maintain that an enhanced curriculum of parent engagement can help lessen the perceived challenge regarding working with parents and prevent it from being one of the greatest difficulties beginning teachers face. Imagine if working with parents were to become a rewarding experience, rather than a negative part of the job to be tolerated, and something teachers looked forward to with confidence during their first teaching position. I believe it is possible. If we truly wish to embrace an inclusive, collaborative, and welcoming partnership with our students' parents, I believe it has to start with enhanced training for educators that is accompanied by a

cultural shift in attitude and an emphasis on practical, meaningful engagement. And continuing to grow the strength of preservice teacher education programs in Ontario is precisely how this can be realized.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

The following survey asks questions that are specifically related to consecutive, English, Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs only

1. For your faculty's new 2 year Bachelor of Education (BEd) program commencing in the fall of 2015, has your program been approved through internal governing committees?

1 = Yes (please provide online link or information where this may be accessed)

2 = No

0 = decline to answer

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree did your faculty use the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) accreditation resource guide to help modify your current BEd program to the new 2 year BEd program?

5 = A lot

4 = Quite a bit

3 = No modification

2 = Not very much

1 = Not at all

0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree has your faculty made modifications to your current BEd program?

- 5 = Major modification
- 4 = Somewhat major modification
- 3 = Somewhat minor modification
- 2 = Minor modification
- 1 = No modification
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

4. Does your faculty's current BEd program offer a standalone course on parent engagement?

- 1 = Yes, it is a required course (please provide course code)

- 2 = Yes, it is an elective course (please provide course code)

- 3 = No
- 0 = Decline to answer

5. Does your faculty's new 2 year BEd program offer a standalone course on parent engagement?

- 1 = Yes, it is a required course (please provide course code)

- 2 = Yes, it is an elective course (please provide course code)

- 3 = No
- 0 = Decline to answer

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, looking specifically at your current BEd program, to what degree is parent engagement integrated across preservice teacher education?

- 5 = A lot
- 4 = Quite a bit

- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Not very much
- 1 = Not at all
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, looking ahead to your new 2 year BEd program, to what degree is parent engagement integrated across preservice teacher education?

- 5 = A lot
- 4 = Quite a bit
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Not very much
- 1 = Not at all
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, comparing your faculty's current BEd program with its new 2 year BEd program, how much has the content of your parent engagement pedagogy increased?

- 5 = A lot
- 4 = Quite a bit
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Not very much
- 1 = Not at all
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

9. On scale of 1 to 5, to what degree is your faculty familiar with Ontario's 2010 parent engagement policy?

- 5 = A lot
- 4 = Quite a bit
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Not very much
- 1 = Not at all
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

10. To the best of your knowledge, did your faculty consult Ontario's 2010 parent engagement policy to help in the modification of its current BEd program to the new 2 year BEd program?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Don't know
- 0 = Decline to answer

11. Ontario regulation 283/13 (Amending O. Reg. 347/02, Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs, approved October 2013) requires that teacher education programs include, how to create and maintain the various types of professional relationships between and among members of the College, students, parents, the community, school staff and member of other professions (Regulation 283/13, Schedule 1, The Teaching Context Knowledge, para 6). How is your faculty addressing this requirement in your new teacher education programs?

- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration

12. On a scale of 1 to 5, in your opinion, how much do you think your faculty's new 2 year BEd program will better prepare teacher candidates to engage parents?

- 5 = A lot
- 4 = Quite a bit
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Not very much
- 1 = Not at all
- 0 = Decline to answer

Comments or Elaboration (please make a selection above prior to commenting)

If you consented to participate in both this survey and a follow up interview (option 2) please provide your name, preferred contact telephone number and/or email address. The researcher will contact you at a convenient time specified below, within one week, to arrange a suitable interview time.

Name: _____

Preferred contact telephone number and/or email address:

Best time(s) to be contacted:

Thank you kindly for participating in this survey.

Appendix B

Telephone Interview Questions

Instructions

Introduction and thanks for participating in this telephone interview

- It consists of 3 questions
- It should not take more than 25 minutes

Obtain verbal consent for recording **prior** to commencing questions

- For ease of transcription purposes, I would like to record our conversation
- If you choose not to have our conversation recorded, you may still participate in this interview without penalty
- If you answer yes, you agree to have this conversation recorded, and I will begin the recording and questions
- If you answer no, you agree to continue with the interview but the conversation will not be recorded
- You may decline to participate at any time at which point I will immediately cease the interview, and you may decline to answer or pass on any question at any time
- May I have your consent to record this interview?

Hit the record button, or not, and begin with the following interview questions:

Questions

1. With regards to your faculty's current/existing 1 year consecutive BEd program, can you tell me in more detail about the parent engagement (PE) training preservice teachers receive? Leading prompts if there's a stall:

- How often is PE taught, how much exposure would you say preservice teachers receive?
- How is it taught – example: a separate unit within a course (and what specific course would that be) or integrated across several courses? Throughout the year or individual sections?
- What courses included parent engagement? Example: special education?
- Tell me about the practical PE opportunities preservice teachers receive?

- How much opportunity is there to practice parent engagement communication skills?

2. In this transition from a 1 year BEd program to a 2 year BEd program, can you tell me more about the resources and/or personnel the faculty consulted with in regards to the PE training for preservice teachers? Leading prompts:

- Was the OCT accredited resource guide consulted?
- Was Ontario's parent engagement policy consulted?
- Were any other policies consulted? People? Parent engagement office at the Ministry of Education? Students? Parents? Other faculties of education? Or will they consult others?
- What or who did the faculty use/consult when they were revising the PE piece within the curriculum? Or who/what they are in the process of consulting?
- How did they come about a consensus for PE curriculum? Or how will they?
- Did the faculty feel there was a need to increase PE pedagogy? If not, why not?
- If so, what specific areas were of concern?

3. Can you tell me more about how your faculty plans to implement the new OCT guidelines into your new 2 year consecutive BEd program? Leading prompts:

- What is PE pedagogy going to look like in the new program? Same? More? Less?
- What are the specific resources/articles/texts/materials that preservice teachers will use? Example: research by Henderson & Mapp (Beyond the Bake Sale), the importance of communication skills – what specifically will professors be using as their pedagogy and practice on PE?
- Will there be a standalone course? Required? Elective?
- Will there be a specific/designated “unit” within a course? What course would that be?
- Will there be a change in preservice teachers' practical opportunities for PE?
- Can you describe for me what the practical opportunities will look like, if any?
- Will there be integration throughout the 2 years across courses? What will that look like?
- Will Ontario's parent engagement policy be part of the curriculum?

Appendix C

Email Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Faculty of Education member,

PLEASE FORWARD THIS INVITATION TO A KEY FACULTY MEMBER(S) WHO WAS OR IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR NEW TWO YEAR CONSECUTIVE BACHELOR OF EDUCATION PROGRAM.

My name is Tracy Bachellier and I am a Master of Education student at the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am interested in studying parent engagement pedagogy and practice within Ontario's consecutive Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs. Specifically, the purpose of this exploratory study is to survey and interview Ontario faculties of education to determine how they plan to implement the new parent engagement and communication Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) guidelines into the curriculum of their new two year Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs.

This study consists of an online questionnaire through Survey Monkey and will only take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Should you wish to do so, there is an additional opportunity to participate in a follow up interview. There are no risks to participating in this study and benefits include insight into how preservice teacher education programs may better prepare teachers to communicate with and engage parents in their children's learning. No personally identifiable questions will be asked and SSL encryption, password protection and IP address masking procedures will be in place to ensure confidentiality.

Only Survey Monkey and I will have access to the electronic data which will be analyzed and presented in thesis format in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. The results will be available by contacting Wilfrid

Laurier University's Faculty of Education office at (519) 884-0710, after December 2014.

Participation is voluntary. You may decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may decline to answer any question(s) you choose and to not have your responses quoted in the final report. This online survey and telephone interview has been approved by Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca.

I cordially invite you to participate in this study. The link below will direct you to the online survey where you may indicate your electronic informed consent prior to starting the survey.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

Should you wish to not participate in this research study, you may click the opt out link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

I thank you kindly in advance for your consideration and support.

Appendix D

Electronic Informed Consent

The purpose of this study is to survey and interview key stakeholders within Ontario faculties of education to determine how they plan to implement the new Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) guidelines for parent engagement and communication into the curriculum of their new consecutive two year Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs. The researcher is a Master of Education student at the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty by clicking on the exit button at the top of the survey pages. You have the right to decline to answer any question(s) you choose. The procedure involves completing an online questionnaire consisting of 12 questions that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. There is an additional option to participate in a follow up telephone interview of three questions and approximately 25 minutes in length.

Your responses will be confidential. However, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web based transmission. Should you choose to participate in the follow up interview, all personally identifiable information collected, such as your name and telephone number, will be stored separately in password protected electronic format to be accessed by the researcher only. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes and there is the potential for your responses to be quoted in the final report. You may decline to have your responses quoted (see below) but still participate in the study. You may withdraw your consent to have your responses

quoted in the final report at any time by contacting the researcher at the contact information listed in the covering email.

Please print a copy of this consent for your records. This online survey has been approved by Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca. The results of this study will be available online after December, 2014.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below before proceeding. Clicking on either Option 1 or Option 2 below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you voluntarily agree to have your responses quoted in the final report

If you do not wish to participate in this research study, please decline participation by clicking on the Option 3 button below.

- Option 1: I agree to participate in this online survey only
- Option 2: I agree to participate in both this online survey and a telephone interview
- Option 3: I do not wish to participate in this study (exit by clicking the top right button on this page)

Please check the box below if you wish to participate in the study but DO NOT want your responses quoted in the final report.

- I agree to participate in this study but I do not want to have my responses quoted in the final report

Proceed to survey [NEXT](#)