

Teacher Professional Development for Parent Engagement

Meeting the Teaching Council's Céim requirements

Introduction

Research for many decades has shown that students whose parents or family members are involved in their learning have better academic and life outcomes (Epstein et al., 2019) and that 'high-quality and high-performing schools have strong partnerships with their students' families and communities' (Sheldon, 2019, p.40).

Yet despite the strong evidence and increased legislation worldwide requiring schools and teachers to adopt a partnership approach in their work, as well as changing accreditation requirements for teachers, most teacher education programmes do little to prepare teachers to build relationships with parents (Willemse et al., 2016; Ryan & Lannin, 2021). Very little attention is paid to the place and voice of parents in their children's schooling (Pushor & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Teachers report high levels of anxiety in their encounters with parents, and establishing relationships with families is the most significant challenge encountered when entering the profession (Evans, 2013).

Legislation and accreditation

Increasingly, legislation in many countries requires schools to communicate effectively with families and to organise programmes and practices that involve families in their children's school learning. The role of parents as primary educators is enshrined in the Constitution of Ireland (1937), and working in partnership with parents is specified throughout the Education Act (1998).

Several other Department of Education and Skills (DES) policies and curriculum frameworks also refer to



Dr Sandra Ryan

Mary Immaculate College

Despite increased legislation and accreditation requirements for teachers, most teacher education programmes do little to prepare teachers to build relationships with parents. This article contributes to this under-researched area. Findings inform how we could expand support for beginning teachers to develop their family engagement practices and the development of initial teacher education and continuing professional development courses to meet the new Céim standards.

encouraging parental involvement. Partnership with parents is a core aspect of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, and the DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2017) requires school planning for parent involvement.

Recent reaccreditation of all teacher education programmes in Ireland has been guided by *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Teaching Council, 2020). Notably, 'Professional Relationships and working with parents' (p.14) is identified as a compulsory area of study for all initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and as an important aspect of graduate teachers' professional values, skills, knowledge, and understanding.

Research

Ryan (2019) surveyed the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes of third-year bachelor of education students towards parent engagement before and after undertaking a module on the topic. Overall, in line with international findings (Morris & Taylor, 1998; Uludag, 2008), student teachers acquired important skills and understanding about their role as teachers in working with parents, and the benefits of involving parents in their children's school learning. After the module, all respondents reported a more positive attitude towards engaging parents and felt better prepared to do that.

For a majority, their greatest fears about working with parents (before the module) related to creating good working relationships and professional boundaries, communication difficulties (including language barriers), and understanding cultural differences. A small number identified fears about dealing with aggressive, angry, or upset parents. After the module, the majority said these issues had been addressed.

Key learning included being aware and open to their role of involving parents, and having skills and attitudes to do this work. Students felt equipped to make parents feel welcome and agreed that parents had valuable insights to share with them about their children. Other learning included understanding parents' possible fears about schools, and a broader perspective on parents' role in education, particularly fathers'. Respondents understood the learning benefits for children, particularly of initiatives with a curricular focus. All agreed that all student teachers should undertake a course on parent engagement.

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of providing focused education and high-quality experiences to prepare student teachers for their work with families (e.g., Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Graue, 2005). In addition to developing specific skills and strategies, it is important to nurture essential dispositions such as positive attitudes towards families and an empowerment perspective that views parents as partners, values and supports

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of providing focused education and high-quality experiences to prepare student teachers for their work with families.

cultural and social diversity, and is committed to communicating effectively and to ongoing learning about family engagement (Swick, 2004).

Family, community, culture

Much research worldwide indicates that pre-service teachers have limited experience of families and children from social, cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds that differ from their own (Bleicher, 2011). Kidd et al. (2008) posited that many pre-service teachers hold assumptions about and lack general awareness of other cultures, including the influence that culture can have on a family's values, beliefs, and childrearing. Teachers tend to be judgemental of parents whose class, culture, race, or language is different from their own dominant white middle-class norm and view them with hostility and deficit-based thinking (Noguera, 2011). Another concern is that lack of awareness of social inequalities associated with social class can lead pre-service teachers to hold deficit perspectives and to blame families for children's poor school performance (Kidd et al., 2008).

Lack of awareness of social inequalities associated with social class can lead pre-service teachers to hold deficit perspectives and to blame families for children's poor school performance.

Graue and Brown (2003) suggested that many pre-service teachers perceive some parents as not caring about their children or about school, rather than reflecting on existing differences between school and home practices. One survey of pre-service teachers found that almost a third were fearful about 'trying to relate to people who are not like me' or 'who come from a different background' (Bleicher, 2011, p.1174). Some student teachers, based on their experience of 'curriculum of parents', had begun to see themselves as part of the parent community rather than being outside it (Pushor, 2014).

Teacher competences

Westergård (2013) proposed the following competences as central:

1. *Relational competence* refers to the teacher's ability to build connections with parents, to be welcoming and kind and develop good relationships as well as strategies for dealing with conflict and criticism.
2. *Communication competence* relates to the teacher's ability to communicate openly, positively, and respectfully and to encourage two-way communication with parents. Hornby (2011) extends this to include skills in listening (including active listening), counselling, assertiveness, and group leadership.
3. *Context competence* refers to teachers' self-efficacy regarding their work, and knowing how to handle difficult situations in class and how to discuss challenging issues with parents.

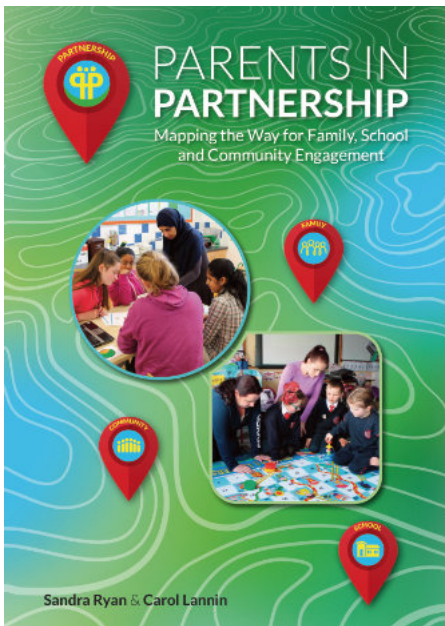
Course content and methodologies

Research and experience indicate that interactive, discursive, and reflective approaches are most effective with student teachers requiring time to reflect on often strongly held beliefs and practices, as well as time for transformation to occur (Ryan & Lannin, 2021). Patte (2011) suggests that coursework should include developing a philosophy of working with diverse families, designing family action plans and analysis of teaching cases. The importance of interaction with successful educators and practical experiences with families and communities is also clear, in line with international research (Uludag, 2008), but this presents many practical challenges when dealing with large cohorts of students.

The timing of such a module within ITE programmes is important, as greater maturity and school-based experience help student teachers understand the complexities of family contexts and backgrounds and the possibilities of parent roles. While initial training and education are important, one course alone cannot address the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies, and there is a need for integration across programme areas (Morris & Taylor, 1998).

Conclusion

All initial teacher education programmes must now address parent engagement, but this should be followed by ongoing training and support so that it becomes a core part of the work of all teachers in all schools.



REFERENCES

- Baum, A.C. and McMurray-Schwarz, P. (2004) 'Preservice teachers' beliefs about family involvement: Implications for teacher education', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(1), 57–61.
- Bleicher, E. (2011) 'Parsing the language of racism and relief: Effects of a short-term urban field placement on teacher candidates' perceptions of culturally diverse classrooms', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(8), 1170–1178.
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017) *DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*. Dublin: DES.
- Epstein, J.L. (2018) 'School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 397–406.
- Epstein, J.L., Sanders, M.G., Sheldon, S.B., Simon, B.S., Clark Salinas, K., Rodriguez Jansorn, N., Van Voorhis, F.L., Martin, C.S., Thomas, B.G., Greenfeld, M.D., Hutchins, D.J., and Williams, K.J. (Eds.) (2019) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Evans, M.P. (2013) 'Educating preservice teachers for family, school, community engagement', *Teaching Education*, 24(2), 123–133.
- Graue, E. (2005) 'Theorizing and describing preservice teachers' images of families and schooling', *Teachers College Record*, 107(1), 157–185.
- Graue, E. and Brown, C.P. (2003) 'Preservice teachers' notions of families and schooling', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19, 719–735.
- Hornby, G. (2011) *Parental Involvement in Childhood Education: Building Effective School–Family Partnerships*. Springer.
- Kidd, J.K., Sanchéz, S.Y., and Thorp, E.K. (2008) 'Defining moments: Developing culturally responsive dispositions and teaching practices in early childhood preservice teachers', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(2), 316–329.
- Morris, V.G. and Taylor, S.I. (1998) 'Alleviating barriers to family involvement in education: The role of teacher education', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14(2), 219–231.
- Noguera, P. (2011) 'Urban schools must start empowering parents', *City Limits*, 11 April.
- Patte, M.M. (2011) 'Examining preservice teacher knowledge and competencies in establishing family-school partnerships', *School Community Journal*, 21(2), 143–159.
- Pushor, D. (2014) 'Teachers' narrative understandings of parents: Living and reliving "possible lives" as professionals', *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*, 1(1), 40–57.
- Pushor, D., and Ciuffetelli Parker, D. (2013) 'Reformation of storied assumptions of parents and poverty', *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 7(2), 164–176.
- Ryan, S. (2019) 'Pre-service teacher attitudes to and sense of efficacy in relation to family engagement'. Paper presented at the European Research Network About Parents in Education (ERNAPE), Gdansk, Poland.
- Ryan, S. and Lannin, C. (2021) *Parents in Partnership: Mapping the Way for Family, School and Community Partnerships*. Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- Sheldon, S.B. (2019) 'Improving student outcomes with school, family, and community partnerships. A research review'. In: J.L. Epstein et al. (Eds.) *School*,

Family, and Community Partnerships. Your Handbook for Action, 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Swick, K. (2004) *Empowering Parents, Families, Schools and Communities During the Early Childhood Years*. Champaign, IL: Stipes.

Teaching Council (2020) *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.

Uludag, A. (2008) 'Elementary preservice teachers' opinions about parental involvement in elementary children's education', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(3), 807–817.

Westergård, E. (2013) 'Teacher competencies and parental cooperation', *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 7(2), 91–99.

Willemse, T.M., Vloeberghs, L., de Bruïne, E.J., and Van Eynde, S. (2016) 'Preparing teachers for family-school partnerships: A Dutch and Belgian perspective', *Teaching Education*, 27(2), 212–228.

Mature Student Keith graduates from SETU

It's never too late to be what you want to be and, for many, it takes thought, time, and a little innovation to realise their dream.



This is especially true for Keith Tracey, for whom SETU was pivotal in “opening his eyes to what was possible in the 3D printing world.”

Having discovered 3D printing 22 years after leaving secondary school, Keith now fronts additive manufacturing start-up XYZ3D.

Keith says he always had “an itch to go into some form of engineering”. That ambition was put on ice when he failed to get sufficient Leaving Certificate points for his top choice, so the resourceful teen chose a more hands-on route where he “developed a vast array of skills, even if none of them were certified”.

Keith was among the first cohort of students to study additive manufacturing at SETU. Now, scroll in hand, Keith Tracey, BSc in Additive Manufacturing, is pictured here on graduation day in SETU Arena in Waterford.