

Title page:

Trainee teachers' perceptions about parent partnerships: Are parents' partners?

1. Catherine Meehan (Canterbury Christ Church University)
2. Patrick Meehan

Word count: 8053

Abstract

Children's life chances when their learning at home is supported collaboratively with early years' and other educational settings. This original piece of research involved second year trainee teachers who were surveyed about their perceptions about parents and the nature of the partnership relationship. Meehan (2007) previously explored early childhood teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers act in accordance with their beliefs when their knowledge, understanding and confidence of that area is high. Using this assumption, this small scale study explores the student teachers perceptions about parents. In order to ensure rigour, the study was contextualised in the literature drawing on qualitative research methods including use of open-ended questions. The study considered the participants own experiences of families and parenting and were debriefed following their participation. Contextual Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the policy based data for this project. The initial findings suggest that the challenge for new teachers is their own confidence in their potential relationships with parents in relation to their feelings of being qualified but a novice. The four themes that emerged from the data provide a useful framework for the development of a questionnaire for the purpose of investigating this topic further. This further study will pursue the relationship that trainee teachers' beliefs and perceptions about parents and their expectations for their role in the teaching partnership and how this evolves as they begin their teaching career. This is a timely paper, given the proposed changes in the White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016), which will impact on the future training of teachers in England.

Keywords- parent partnership, teachers' beliefs, professional identity, teacher education programmes, policy and practice

Introduction

“If parents are to be genuine partners in their children’s education then they must be able to share power, responsibility and ownership in ways which show a high degree of mutuality” (Tett, 2001, p. 194).

If the situation described above is achieved in early childhood settings and schools, it portrays a picture of parents and teachers collaborating in their endeavours to support the teaching and learning for children. The quote makes some assumptions about the nature of the relationship, one which is equal with shared values and opportunities for dialogue. However, Tett (2001) continues the discussion by remarking that this is not the reality. In fact, more often than not, parent and school relationships take place on the terms of the ‘professionals’, using their language, location, within social structures which create barriers for parents who are not part of this social or professional group and may result in parents experiencing ‘inequality, social distance and powerlessness’ (Tett, 2001, p. 195).

This paper presents the findings from a small scale study that explored the attitudes and views held about parents from second year pre-service primary teachers. The participants have had two placement experiences in schools and were about to embark on a third placement. The interactions with parents in their placements to date had been limited, but the expectation of the programme meant that this part of their professional role was in focus and that working with parents was central to their emerging identity as a teacher.

Background to the paper

The trainee teachers in England are working towards the achievement of eight teaching standards. Their training involves time in schools on placement and in university on a three-year undergraduate route to becoming primary teachers. Their training is geared towards supporting their achievement of these standards. The Preamble of the Teaching Standards state:

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; **and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils** (p. 10). In England, trainee teachers are working towards demonstrating attainment of 8 teaching standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status. Teaching Standard 8 requires trainees demonstrate their capacity to “Fulfil wider professional responsibilities.” Within this standard, trainees are expected to,

Make positive contribution to wider life and ethos of the school, develop effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support, deploy support staff effectively, take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues and to **communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being** (p. 13).

The discourse surrounding the role of parents in English education system is dichotomous. For example, in the Teaching Standards (2013) the word 'Parent' is used four times. Twice in the glossary, once in the preamble (as shown above) and once in the elaboration for Teaching Standard 8. Another example is the "School and Parents report" (2011), OFSTED used the word 'parents' 437 times. Parents in this report are referred to in the following ways:

- "valued" due their role in their children's education
- "support" better outcomes for children, particularly those who are vulnerable
- "communication", face to face, newsletters and emails as most effective means
- "complaints" and the need for a 'streamlined process' and that parent complaints 'to be used as impetus for change of practice or policy'
- "parallel role" for parents to work alongside teachers to enhance the school.

Similarly, in the Department for Education's Single Departmental Plan: 2015 to 2020 (2016) there were six uses of the word 'parents' and none of the references referred to parents as important in children's education. This is inconsistent with the aims expressed in Articles 5, 14, 18 and 27 of UNCRC 1989 wherein the parent rather than the State is constructed as primarily responsible for the upbringing of children

The Education Excellence Everywhere White Paper (2016) again referred to parents and families, but their role is more as a consumer. Morgan describes in the White Paper that her intention is to create a "School-led system with every school an academy, empowered pupils, parents and communities and a clearly defined role for local government." The 'defined' role for Local Authorities in the White Paper is described as "Acting as champions for all parents and families." The plan for making all schools into academies was reversed due to significant feedback from schools and the sector, but the intentions for parents and their role within the system continue.

The way in which parents are viewed in current and recent UK education policy documents does not position them in the place they should be held if the UK is serious about adherence to the provisions of the UNCRC 1989. If policy and practice did adhere to these obligations, then such a construction would see parents play a critical decision making role in the lives of children. In the UK policy

rhetoric positions parents as the first educators of children who play a central role in supporting children's development. Yet key documents about teachers, schools and the Department for Education, do not recognise the potential and powerful possibilities that positive relationships might have on children reaching their potential. Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) note that within Special Education Needs provision, parents have been constructed in a different way. For example, partnership with parents is embedded in policy dating back to the Warnock Report (1978).

Relationship between teachers' perceptions and their actions

Understanding the relationship between teachers' perceptions and attitudes is important as it is linked to their actions in their daily work. When teachers are competent and have high levels of confidence, typically their actions are congruent with their perceptions/attitudes and beliefs (Meehan, 2007; Meehan, 2011). With a trainee teacher, who is not yet a qualified teacher, their confidence and competence is at various stages of development. The trainee teachers in their two years of study have been focused on developing curriculum knowledge, technical and skills of their profession whilst developing other aspects of the role in which they are training for. The emergent identity as a professional teacher and their interactions with parents are shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Home and school partnerships as vital to educational achievement

The literature and recent research, highlights the significance of high quality early childhood education and care and the relationship to children's life chances. Co-operation between school and home can raise educational achievement and the evidence suggests that life chances are further enhanced by home support (Tett, 2010, p. 194). The first three years of life see the child's brain development shaped by their early experiences. Field (2010) suggested that by the age of three and then by school age, there were differences in children's abilities and that the "evidence is clear that children from poorer backgrounds do worse cognitively and behaviourally than those from more affluent home" (p.7). Field (2010) concluded that "family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money, in determining whether their potential is realised in adult life."

In a similar report, Allen (2011) highlighted the role of parental aspirations as being a significant factor in children's learning and development. The fathers level of interest, the mothers level of qualifications were key determinants of children's educational outcomes, thereby improving their life chances. Both Field (2010) and Allen (2011) highlight the importance and significance of parents' involvement in their child's education.

Parents are important in children's educational achievement. Harris and Goodall (2008) investigated parent partnership and the impact on student achievement. They worked with 20 schools which represented diverse populations. Their primary findings suggest that parental engagement at home in children's learning makes the greatest difference to children's achievement. School-based activities have little, if any impact on children which is interesting given the strong emphasis which New Labour policies placed on before and after school clubs. The study by Harris and Goodall (2008) identified a significant barrier to parent-school partnerships and parental engagement. That is, schools perpetuate or reinforce existing power 'divisions' between home and school and may reproduce and highlight educational inequalities such as class, gender and ethnicity. This is most commonly seen in the language of schools and professionals. This remains a challenge for schools.

Schools, parents and families

Parents and families in collaboration with teachers and schools have a joint responsibility to protect, care for and educate children. Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) define parent partnerships as "cooperation between parents and schools, LEAs and others". Dictionary definitions for the word 'partner' indicate that a partner is:

1. a person who shares or is associated with another in some action or endeavour
2. an equal with the power or ability to alter the nature of, or withdraw from, a collective action or endeavour

If parents are viewed as partners in supporting their children's learning, if the definitions above are applied, then parents would be viewed in the following way. If parents and teachers are associated by the joint endeavour of educating children as envisaged under the UNCRC 1989, then this is a shared and focused relationship which suggests that both parents and teachers seek to achieve the same outcomes for the child/ren. As in any partnership, communication, collaboration and negotiation are inferred as essential elements. However, the way in which schools and education have been constructed as a function of UK society, means that the idealised partnership may not be possible, or arguably desired by government.

Since the creation of formal education systems, UK education has been used as a major agent of socialisation and there have always been strong elements of class and religious bias inherent in design and delivery. Indeed, Adam Smith in 1785 argued that the education of middle and lower classes was to be a deliberate activity of the State because

An instructed and intelligent people besides are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant one . . . less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of the government (Smith 1785: 305).

Such views remained current almost a century later when Robert Lowe stated that:

The lower classes must now be educated . . . they must be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher civilisation when they meet it (Lowe 1867: 8).

The constructions of the nature and purpose of education framed the decade of debate culminating in the passage of the Elementary Education Act 1870 and show clearly how parents were often seen as incidental to the raising of socially useful children. Despite the passage of time and the enormous social changes in the UK such views still seem to inform some aspects of government construction of education as a form of organised human activity, even if no longer so explicitly.

In 1915, Dewey described schooling as a place in which children ‘absorb’ knowledge and then reproduce it on demand. The longer term aim of education is that education will lead to full participation in society in adulthood and the ability to resolve concrete and abstract real world problems (pp. 24-25). Dewey’s influence on education has been well-documented in research about education. By contrast, Arendt (1954) challenged the role of schools in socialisation when she recognised the importance of parents and families in children’s lives and role in socialisation. Parents are not only responsible for bringing children into the world. Parents and families as the primary agents of socialisation, face challenges in establishing and maintaining a relationship with schools and teachers. The shifts of power and knowledge between home and school are constantly negotiated in transitions which are not seamless and often have conflicting agendas in terms of what is deemed best for the children. This returns us to the issue of UK policy being incongruent with the aims of the UNCRC 1989 in regard to the centrality of parent rather than State as the prime agent of socialisation.

This is linked to the second definition of partners, that is, that the relationships between parents and teachers is “equal with the power or ability to alter the nature of, or withdraw from, a collective action or endeavour”. The source of the unequal nature of the parent-teacher relationship, is articulated by Tett (2010) who suggested that the relationship

takes place very much on the professionals’ terms- conceptualised through professional ideology and articulated through professional language, all of which create barriers for parents.... The result for parents is “inequality, social distance and powerlessness (Tett, 2010, p. 195).

In England today, the only way that parents can truly exercise this ability to alter or withdraw from the relationship is by withdrawing their children from the system and educating them in the home. Alternatively, if schools and teachers are serious about having partnership with parents, then communication, collaboration and negotiation of power, responsibility and ownership within the relationship needs to be shared (Tett, 2010). This is one reason that the perceptions of trainee teachers towards parents needs to be examined. If this group of trainees can appreciate the complexity and power in the relationship, then perhaps if they value parents, this will become evident in their practice as their identity as a teacher and a professional matures.

What does a good parent look like?

Determining what a “good” or “bad” parent looks like will be a subjective decision and an individual teacher will form this view based on their experience, values and beliefs. This is a deep-seeded epistemological view which permeates the thoughts and actions of the individual. The research interest stems from a recent reflection of my own assumptions about parents and children. The following account highlights some of the assumptions professionals make about parents and their capacity to support children’s learning.

I was sitting in a coffee shop the week before Christmas... This is what I saw.... A big bloke, tattoos, many facial piercings in ears and eyebrow, goatee beard, multiple large knuckle buster rings, a motorbike jacket with chain... Black heavy metal t-shirt with a blood stained image. The badge on the jacket said “Drink Drop Doss Rally 2013”. *(This type of guy would be one that as a female in a dark alley I would avoid on looks alone.)*

So I sat and watched for over an hour, a biker with his 9-year-old son.

I sat and listened to the dad reading, he was not a confident reader, especially out loud as he hesitated between words. He was sitting at the table for talking and reading with his son... They were not reading novels or school texts but they both shared an interest in WWE. They laughed and talked as they read short articles in the pile of magazines in front of them and shared facts they both had At one point the nine-year-old boy responded to one of the facts read out by his dad.... Saying I always wondered what happened to him! Remarking on an old WWE star who had not been seen for a while.

There was pure joy in the boy's face as he chatted with his dad.... They looked into each other's eyes, smiled and laughed with each other in a very warm and familiar manner. They shared corny Christmas jokes from a kids magazine.

The child was appropriately dressed for winter and looked healthy and well fed.

(I put on my professional hat and tried to work out the relationship between father and child, was this a custodial visit? Was this a regular event? Were they waiting for someone to meet them? My thoughts then moved onto how this dad would fit into a school, how would he be perceived by teachers and staff, and what skills would he have to communicate with teachers and professionals about his son and his interests.)

As an experienced teacher, I am able to recognise my own biases and reflect on the above situation and consider how my role in education is shaped by the children and families I work with. This is not always the case for trainee teachers, who in the undergraduate trainee teacher programme are predominantly school leavers before commencing University. As a parent I can also reflect on the perceived barriers that I have faced in attempting to participate as an equal partner in my child's education.

My initial impressions about the parent in the scene above where based on his physical appearance only, I made assumptions about him, his social class, his education and employment background, the nature of the relationship with his child. Rightly or wrongly, as human beings it is reported that within the first 10 seconds of meeting someone, we make a judgement about them. Teachers are not immune to this.

Tett (2010) aptly suggests that a 'good' parent:

Behaves in particular ways, "positive attitude towards school and encourages child to have the same", "prepares them for school" and "does not disrupt the smooth running of the school" (p. 193).

Hujala, Turja, Gaspar, Veisson and Waniganayake (2009) examined early childhood teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher partnerships in five European countries (Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Portugal). They found significant cultural differences. For example, in Portugal, the role of family is supreme and the State treads carefully and reluctantly in matters related to child rearing. By contrast, Finnish teachers and the State see themselves as having a collective responsibility to intervene when 'poor parenting' is observed. Although important cultural differences exist, across the five countries, there was consensus in defining what good parents look like to teachers. Good parents were described as those who engage with staff, invest time and effort in their child's education and care and who are able to interact with teachers. This collective view does not however recognise the complexities of parent-teacher relationships and the social capital required to engage in a full

partnership. Significantly, it also does not reflect the considerable socio-economic inequalities in UK society and its' formal education systems.

Methods

The research questions for this study were:

1. What are trainee teachers' perceptions about the role of parents in their child/ren's education?
2. What are trainee teachers' perceptions about parents?

In order to ascertain what their perceptions and attitudes were toward parents, using qualitative research methodologies, two methods were used to generate data for this small scale project. Firstly, open-ended questionnaires were given to 230 second year trainee Primary Education teachers before a lecture. Open-ended questions were used to enable to trainee teachers to respond in an unconstrained way to the research questions. Cresswell (2008) suggests that an advantage to the use of open-ended questions allows for a range of responses, both brief and lengthy, but also very rich in content. The data in this study elicited the trainee teachers' key words to describe their perceptions about parents and the role of parents in their child/ren's education. Trainee teachers were specifically asked:

- Who are parents?
- What are their feelings about parents?
- Describe examples of their experiences with parents

Trainees teachers were encouraged to be descriptive in their written responses to the questions above. The data clearly reflects the trainee teachers' experiences, views and attitudes towards parents and their role in children's education.

Secondly, key policy documents were analysed to gain an appreciation about how teacher-parent relationships are constructed as an influence on the emergent identity of these pre-professionals. Contextual Discourse/Policy Analysis (CDA) was adopted to analyse the policy document data for this project. McMillan and McConnell (2015) drew on the work of Ozga (1987), Taylor (1997) and Fairclough (2000) to adapt this method for critically analysing policy documents. For the purpose of this paper, the analysis of policy documents underwent a multi-layered approach. Initially, an appreciation of the policy context was undertaken. Then consideration was given to the text within the policy in relation to the key terms/themes under interrogation in this paper, namely parents and partnership. Examples were drawn from the policy documents as evidence that further informed the coding and categorisation of trainee teacher/participant responses. This provided an opportunity for the data to be triangulated in relation to the wider body of literature.

The data from the open-ended questions and the policy analysis were analysed using a grounded theory approach to data analysis. Dick (2002) described the process of the grounded approach as an emergent process with specific steps undertaken in the research situation. These steps include: note-taking, coding and categorizing, sorting, writing and constantly comparing data.

Results

The results presented in this section are presented in four themes. The themes and sub-themes are outlined below emerged from the data collected and subsequent analysis.

Theme 1: Perceptions about the role of parents

The student teachers' responses to an open-ended question about what parents do and who they are in the lives of children, elicited nine subthemes. These sub-themes are shown in the table 1 below, with an example of a typical response.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Theme 2: Perceptions about parents

The student teachers' responses to an open-ended question about what parents are and what their feelings are about parents, elicited eight subthemes. These sub-themes are shown in the table 2 below, with an example of a typical response.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Theme 3: Perceptions about characteristics that are supportive of positive relationships with parents

The student teachers' responses to an open-ended question about what makes a 'good' parent, elicited seven subthemes. These sub-themes are shown in the table 3 below, with an example of a typical response.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Theme 4: Perceptions about characteristics that create barriers to positive relationships with parents

The student teachers' responses to an open-ended question about what makes a 'bad' parent, elicited nine subthemes. These sub-themes are shown in the table 4 below, with an example of a typical response.

Discussion

Four themes will now be discussed in this section of the paper. They include the trainee teachers' perceptions about the role of parents, their perceptions about the nature of their relationship with parents, their perceptions about the characteristics parents that are supportive of positive relationships or present more challenges to work with.

Firstly, parents are perceived by trainee teachers as having a range of diverse roles. The views of trainee teachers tended to be polarised. For example, these roles or functions range from the biological life-giver to the person who perpetrates or harms their own child or parents were enablers versus restrictors to children's growth and development. An example of a typical response from a trainee teacher suggested that

They should only have children if they are prepared to take full responsibility of their welfare, provide adequate care and love and support them.

These views are consistent with how parents were portrayed in the policy documents related to "Every Child Matters". This broadly Engelian socialist discourse dominated the policy landscape in England between 2003 and 2010, and reflects a policy trajectory by New Labour owing more to Adam Smith and Robert Lowe than to Marx, in how it constructs working class parents, Gewirtz (2001). Central to this discourse was the move by the State to take a policy designed in the Children Act 1989 for a minority of children and families and apply it to the majority under the Children Act 2004. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in his introduction to the policy stated:

For most parents, our children are everything to us: our hopes, our ambitions, our future. Our children are cherished and loved. But sadly some children are not so fortunate. Some children's lives are different. Dreadfully different, instead of joy, warmth and security of normal family life, these children's lives are filled with risk, fear and danger; and from what most of us would regard as the worst possible source- from the people closest to them.

The words 'parent' or 'parenting' were used 141 times in Every Child Matters (2003) policy. The majority of references to parents related to articulating support for parents in terms of those parents who are 'hard to engage' or who will require training and intervention from the state. These views reflect the range of responses made by the trainee teachers with regard to their perceptions about the role of parents. On one hand, the trainee teachers echoed Tony Blair, in recognition that the majority of parents' function as the major stakeholder in their child's educational and life success with a vital role to love the child unconditionally and support their development. However, this is juxtaposed with the more negative images of parents as presenting a danger to their own children and this reflects the

frequent deliberate explicit linkages that Blair made between the death of Victoria Climbié and the introduction of the ECM 2003 policy agenda.

The failure of trainee teachers to see the safety of children as a prime concern of all parents is consistent with Every Child Matters policy, which contained the word 'partner', 41 times. This is reflected in how that document never clarified the term in respect of the relationship between parents and their child's educators and hedged around the aims of the UNCRC 1989 to position the parent rather than State as the one primarily responsible for the child.

Alarming, by 2009 the New Labour government policy language toward parents had shifted significantly, with 'hard to engage' parents now being termed 'resistant' in the tellingly named White Paper, *Your Children, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools System*. (TSO 2009). That document explicitly aimed at the conversion of public schools into Academies, and accordingly it positioned parents much more as consumers of a marketable commodity, than as partners in the furtherance of a social good. Clearly, such marketised constructions of public education informed daily school interactions with parents and children and these in turn will have shaped the views of the trainee teachers.

Secondly, trainee teachers' perceptions about their relationship with parents highlighted some apprehension and at the same time valuing the potential of having positive relationships with parents. One trainee teacher stated that:

As a student teacher I am scared of parents as I know I am responsible for their children

Another trainee teacher stated that they "wanted to be liked as a teacher" which may reflect their implicit understanding of the need to respond to market forces in attracting and retaining children at their school but also seeking approval on a personal level. One trainee identified that they had limited experience working with parents and that this was a reason for their apprehension. The emergent development of identity as a professional and teacher was evident in some of the responses. On one hand the trainee teachers wanted to be viewed as competent, be trusted, accepted and liked, but also to have a status or 'authority' that comes with the professional nature of their role. For example,

I would want parents to be involved in their children's education but respect my decisions as a teacher. Ask questions to understand why I am doing what I am doing but not in a critical way.

Such difficulties in carving out a role as a competent authoritative collaborative professional teacher reflect the challenges faced by several kinds of UK public sector workers due to the policies of

successive UK governments which sought to turn autonomous professionals into obedient process workers (e.g. Braverman, 1974; Pollitt, 1993; Ozga, 1995; McLaughlin, Muncie and Hughes, 2001; Carey, 2009).

Meehan (2007, 2011) supports the findings of this study by recognising the complexity of the relationship between teachers' perceptions and attitudes and the link their day-to-day classroom practice. The trainee teachers are moving from novices to experts and the competence and confidence levels fluctuate as they move through this period of change and transition. A similar process was described by St Clair (2013) in the professional development of trainee nurses and it also echoes considerable literature from Criminology about the development of professionalism in trainee police officers (e.g. Bittner, 1970; Muir, 1977; Fielding, 1988; Brooks, Piquero & Cronin, 1993; Paoline III, 2003). In this process, emotional or formulaic responses tend to dominate thinking until such a time when sufficient experience on the job has given the novice enough successful (and unsuccessful) interactions with their client pool to give the trainee confidence in their own competence.

Thirdly, the notion about the characteristics of parents that enable trainee teachers to create positive relationships with parents will now be discussed. The subjective and emotive nature of the trainee's responses reflect the nature of stage of personal and professional journey towards being a qualified teacher. The focus on the achievement of the QTS standards and namely, number 8 with a focus on communicating effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being, has had an impact on the nature of the responses. For example, the following response was typical of the trainee teachers in this study:

My favourite type of parent would play an active role in engaging with their child's education through further encouragement at home. They would also give the teacher suggestions as to how their child learns best as they know them better than any teacher.

The above response highlights a desire to collaborate with parents but also highlights clear behavioural expectations about how parents should relate to them as teachers. Further examples, suggest that other desirable characteristics parents may be "involved but not over the top", "not pushy, aggressive or ready to blame others". Furthermore, these parents would demonstrate that they "care about their child's learning", and that "they are reliable and supportive of the teacher" (in their role and the views expressed by the teacher. One trainee teacher stated that characteristics of parents that are most desirable are those parents who "trust your professional judgement" or "lets the teacher do their job". In addition, parents who make a positive contribution to the wider school community by volunteering, doing homework with their children, read regularly with their child, and support their child's achievement are characteristics that trainee teachers perceive

to be desirable in parents to enable positive partnerships. These perspectives are consistent with what Tett (2010) suggested made a 'good' parent. That is, they have positive attitudes towards the school and encourage the same in their child. These views are also consistent with the findings of Strauss et al (1963), Schon (1983) McLaughlin, Muncie and Hughes, (2001), Poteyeva and Sun, (2009) from other professional fields about how professionals construct their preferred types of client.

Fourth and finally, characteristics of parents who present more challenges to work from the perspective of the trainee teachers will now be discussed. Although like the previous section, there appears to be a continuum rather than a single characteristic. This is reflective of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina Principle: "All happy families are the same but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

The most challenging characteristics of parents identified by the trainee teachers are represented by a range of words used to describe them. These are juxtaposed between interfering and over-involvement in their child's life through to neglectful disinterest in their children's education. Trainee teachers expressed concerns about parents who were "confrontational, aggressive, rude and dismissive of the teachers' role". For example, some trainee teachers described parents who displayed the following characteristics as the most difficult engage with and form effective partnerships:

Held strong views on how children should/not be taught (possibly outdated views)

Were alcoholic/drug addict/criminal

Never turned up for parent evenings

Doesn't bring the right resources for their child's education

These behavioural characteristics of parents appear to be diametrically opposed to those described by Tett (2010) as those characteristics exhibited by parents who are perceived to be easier to form effective relationships with. Crozier (1998) warned that the parent-school partnership takes place very much on the professionals' terms- conceptualised through professional ideology and articulated through professional language, all of which create barriers for parents.... The result for parents is "inequality, social distance and powerlessness" (p. 195). The characteristics of parents being described in the manner above

creates a barrier and social distance that alienates and marginalises potential allies and constructs them as opponents or foes. The role of the ubiquitous ECM (2003) agenda in shaping the views held by these trainee teachers about parents should neither be overlooked nor understated. This is because these trainee teachers have grown up in an education system that constantly implied that parents were incompetent while proclaiming equality of partnership.

Conclusion

The relationship between teachers and parents, is critical to support children's learning and achievement at school. Hodge et al (2008) suggested that barriers to effective relationships between teacher and parents arise due to the 'hierarchies of knowledge' that potentially create an imbalance of power. The skilled and experienced teacher is able to recognise the importance of parent partnerships and the need for a range of responses when encounters with parents occur. The Department for Education and Schools in (2001), stated that

Parents hold key information. they have unique strength, knowledge and experience to contribute to the shared view of the child's needs and the best ways of supporting them (p. 16).

It is therefore critical that in the training of teachers, opportunities are provided for reflection on their thoughts and actions with regard to their perceptions about parents, their role in their children's education, and what constitutes an effective partnership be given time and space. These reflective spaces need to include consideration of the barriers that schools and teachers create through the use of language, their own personal view and attitudes, universal assumptions that all parents are the same. They should encourage recognition about what parents do bring to the relationship rather than constructing parents as having less social capital, limited social networks with lesser or different vocabulary and that reinforces the power differential. Parents do have social capital, networks and vocabulary, these may be different from those held by teachers and professionals and it is critical that this is recognised so that genuine partnerships can be formed to support children's achievement in schools. This recognition was central to the origin of the very term 'social capital' in the work by Hanifan (1916) seeking to engage teachers with parents at schools in rural Virginia.

In conclusion, with regard to the future of teacher and parent relationships, Tett (2010) encourages that parents to be seen as people with their own rights rather than viewed as problems or resisters to government wisdom. The empowerment of parents as genuine partners is one way to tackle social exclusion and reduce the impact of poverty and social inequality. The rhetoric of the White Paper

(2016), suggests that children and parents are at the heart of the intended reforms to the training of teachers. This is a timely paper. The former Minister of State, Nicky Morgan suggested:

So this white paper sets out our plans for the next five years, building on and extending our reforms to achieve educational excellence everywhere. Where great schools, great leaders and great teachers exist, we will let them do what they do best – helping every child to achieve their full potential. Where they do not, we will step in to build capacity, raise standards and provide confidence for parents and children. We will put children and parents first. We will set high expectations for every child, ensuring that there are no forgotten groups or areas and we will focus on outcomes... Children only get one chance at education and every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. As a parent, I know only too well that childhood is short, and when it comes to a child's education, there's no time to waste. Access to a great education is not a luxury but a right for everyone. (Morgan, 2016, p. 4)

As with previous White Papers though, this one makes frequent use of undefined overall terms whose meaning varies enormously with the political and philosophical views of the speaker. Time will show whether or not it is possible or desirable for genuine change to occur.

References

- Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government*. London: Cabinet Office [Online] Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf> (Accessed: 10.11.13)
- Bittner, E (1970) *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society*. Washington DC National Institute of Mental Health.
- Braverman, H. (1974) *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism; The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York, New York USA. Monthly Review Press.
- Brooks, L.W. Piquero, A. & Cronin, J. (1993) *Police officer attitudes concerning their communities and their roles: A comparison of two suburban police departments*. in *American Journal of Police*. 12 (3): 115-39.
- Cankar, F., Deutsch, T., and Kolar, M. (2009) Teachers and Parents- Partners with different expectations. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 3, (1), 15-28.
- Carey, M. (2009) 'It's a Bit Like Being a Robot or Working in a Factory': Does Braverman Help Explain the Experiences of State Social Workers in Britain Since 1971? *Organisation* 16 (4) 505–527

Cresswell, J. (2008) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Crozier, G. (1998) Parents and schools: partnership or surveillance? *Journal of educational policy*, 13 (1), 125-136.

Douglass, A. and Gittell, J. (2012) Transforming professionalism: relational bureaucracy and parent-teacher partnerships in child care settings. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 10(3), 267-281.

Fairclough, N. (2003) *Analysing discourse and text: Textual analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Field F. (2010) *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances* [Online] Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110120090128/http://povertyreview.independent.gov.uk/media/20254/poverty-report.pdf> (Accessed: 10.11.13)

Fielding, N.G. (1988) *Joining Forces: Police Training, Socialisation and Occupation Competence*. London. Routledge.

Gewirtz, S. (2001) Cloning the Blairs: New Labour's programme for the re-socialization of working-class parents, *Journal of Education Policy*, 16 (4), 365-378,

Hanifan, L. J. (1916). "The Rural School Community Center". *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 67: 130–138.

Harris, A. and Goodall, J. (2008) Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational research*, 50 (3), 277-289.

HM Government. (2016) Education Excellence Everywhere White Paper. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere>

HM Government. (2003). Every child matters. Retrieved March 17, 2015, from <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/EveryChildMatters.pdf>

HM Government (2013) Teacher Standards. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301107/Teachers__Standards.pdf

- Hodge, N. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2008) Problematising parent-professional partnership in education. *Disability and Society*, 23(6), 637-647.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., Walker, J., Jones, K. and Reed, R. (2002) Teachers involving parents (TIP): results of an in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18, pp. 843-867.
- Hujala, E., Turja, L., Gaspar, M.F., Veisson, M. and Waniganayake, M. (2009) Perspectives of early childhood teachers on parent-teacher partnerships in five European countries, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 57-76.
- Katyal, K. and Evers, C. (2007) Parents-Partners or Clients? A reconceptualization of Home-School interactions. *Teaching Education*, 18, (1), 61-76.
- Kroeger, J. and Lash, M. (2011) Asking, listening and learning: Toward a more thorough method of inquiry in home-school relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, p. 268-277.
- Lewis, L., Kim, Y., and Bey, J. (2011) Teaching practices and strategies to involve inner-city parents at home and in the school. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, 221-234.
- Lowe, R. (1960) [1867] Primary and classical education, in Simon, B. (Ed.), *Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870* London. Lawrence and Wishart
- Mapp, K. (2003) Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *The school community Journal*, 13 (1), pp. 35 – 64.
- McLaughlin, E., Muncie, J. and Hughes, G. (2001), *The Permanent Revolution: New Labour, New Public Management and the Modernization of Criminal Justice*. in *Criminal Justice*, Vol.1, No.3, pp.301-18
- McMillan, D. and McConnell, B. (2015) Strategies, systems and services: a Northern Ireland early years' policy perspective. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 23, (3), 245-257.
- Meehan, C. (2007). "Teachers' beliefs about Religious Education in the Early Years." In Grajczonek, J. & Ryan, M. (2007). *Religious Education in Early Childhood: A Reader*. Brisbane: Lumino Press (pp. 138-157).

Meehan, C. (2011) *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The importance of understanding beliefs and practices in the teaching of Religious Education in the Early Years*. *Journal of Religious Education*. https://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/412270/JRE_593_2011_Full_Vesion.pdf

Morris, V. and Taylor, S. (1998) *Alleviating barriers to family involvement in education: the role of teacher education*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14 (2), 219-231.

Muir, W.K. Jnr (1977) *Police: Street-Corner Politicians*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press

Ofsted (2011) *School and Parents report*. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413696/Schools_and_parents.pdf

Ozga, J (1995) *Deskilling a profession: professionalism, deprofessionalisation and the new managerialism*. in *Managing Teachers as Professionals in Schools*, Busher, H. and Saran, R. (Eds) (1995) London. Kogan Page.

Ozga, J. (2000) *Policy Research in Educational Settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Paoline, E.A. III (2003) *Taking Stock : Toward a Richer Understanding of Police Culture*. in *Journal of Criminal Justice* 2003 Vol. 31 pp.199-214

Pollitt, C. (1993), *Managerialism and the Public Services*, (2nd edition), Oxford. Blackwell

Poteyeva, M and Sun, I.Y. (2009) *Gender Differences in Police Officers' Attitudes : Assessing Current Empirical Evidence*. in *Journal of Criminal Justice* 2009 Vol. 37 pp.512-522

Schon, D (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*. New York. Basic Books.

Smith, A. (1785) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

St Clair, Mari Beth, "New Graduate Nurses' Experiences of Transition During Orientation into Critical Care" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 378. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from <http://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1383&context=etd>

Strauss, A., Schatzman, I., Erlich, D., Bucher, R. and Sabshin, M (1963) *The Hospital and Its Negotiated Order*, in Friedman, E (Ed) (1963) *The Hospital in Modern Society*. New York. Free Press of Glencoe.

Taylor, S. (1997) Critical Policy Analysis: Exploring contexts, texts and consequences. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 18, (1), 23-35.

Tett, L. (2001) Parents as problems or parents as people? Parental involvement programmes, schools and adult educators. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (3), pp. 188-198.

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

Warnock, H.M. (1978) *SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.html>

Tables with captions

Table 1: Trainee teachers' perceptions about the role of parents

Subtheme	Example of a typical response
1. Life giver	They should only have children if they are prepared to take full responsibility of their welfare, provide adequate care and love and support them.
2. Restrictors of child's potential	They can come across as trying to take control but really they are trying to get involved so they can support their children to their best ability. Active and supportive of child's education.
3. Guardianship	Teach norms and values to children
4. Opponent	Scary- the parents don't want to hear what you have to say
5. Asset to education	Supportive and nurturing of children. They can be a great asset to a school if the parent-teacher relationship is positive.
6. Biggest stakeholder in child educational and life success	Parents are the most important part of a child's life
7. Holders of highly subjective and often rigid views about education, children and teachers	Strong views on how children should/not be taught (possibly outdated views)
8. Anxious people	They have a hard job.
9. Adults or teens that managed to breed	Biological parents who had children. Adults or teenage parents. People who may look after our pupils out of school hours.

Table 2: Trainee teachers' perceptions about parents

Subtheme	Example of a typical response
1. Teachers apprehensive about interactions due to own inexperience	<p>As a student teacher I am scared of parents as I know I am responsible for their children.</p> <p>I want them to like me as a teacher.</p> <p>scary- the parents don't want to hear what you have to say</p> <p>apprehensive, due to not much experience on placement</p>
2. Can enhance child learning	<p>They are a key part of a child's development in terms of their emotions as well as academic skills.</p> <p>Parents who encourage children to have a positive attitude towards learning.</p>
3. Threat to teachers' professional identity	<p>Someone who is not supportive and has no faith in me as a teacher.</p>
4. An uneasy relationship	<p>Would want parents to be involved in their children's education but respect my decisions as a teacher. Ask questions to understand why I am doing what I am doing but not in a critical way.</p> <p>As a student teacher I am scared of parents as I know I am responsible for their children.</p>
5. Focused on own child rather than group	<p>A parent who refuses to listen or fails to recognise how at times their child can be wrong.</p>
6. Should play active role in child education and care	<p>Parents are a good way to help children and gain insight into their development.</p>
7. No guaranteed "Right" way to parent	<p>Parenting is not easy.</p>

Table 3: Trainee teachers' perceptions about characteristics that are supportive of positive relationships with parents

Subtheme	Example of a typical response
1. Approachable/calm/communicates clearly and well	Involved but not over the top. Not pushy, aggressive or ready to blame others
2. Works with school by allowing teacher to do their job and supporting child's learning at home	Care about their children's learning Understand that they can't do the children's homework but it is good for them to help the child.
3. Reliable, honest, punctual, accepting of personal responsibility	Turns up.
4. Supportive and realistic	Supportive of the teacher and their role and opinions. One that understands that their child isn't perfect.
5. Realistic about the role and capabilities of the teacher	Good parents "trust your professional judgement" or "lets the teacher do their job"
6. Involved in voluntary activities and events at the school/centre	Contribute to the school by volunteering when the school needs help.
7. Reads to, talks and plays with their child regularly	Always have time for their children, unconditional love, best friends, unbroken relationship, committed to helping their child achieve. My favourite type of parent would play an active role in engaging with their child's education through further encouragement at home.

Table 4: Trainee teachers' perceptions about characteristics of parents that create barriers to positive relationships with parents

Subtheme	Example of a typical response
1. Guarded, suspicious, negative, defensive, refuses help	One who doesn't recognise they need help.
2. Aggressive, pushy, disrespectful	Confrontational, intimidating, aggressive/rude and dismissive of role of teachers. "in your face", pushy
3. Uninvolved, Inactive, absent, ignorant, disinterested	Parents in denial of children's disruptive behaviours. Parents that have no passion about their children or learning.
4. Boring, miserable, needy	Too clingy, too involved in child's life. Never happy. They are concerned solely with providing the best education/life for their children. Perhaps not always taking into consideration that teachers also have 20+ other children in their class
5. Unreliable, late, closed-minded, immovable, irresponsible	Strong views on how children should/not be taught (possibly outdated views) alcoholic/drug addict/criminal Never turns up for parent evenings. Doesn't bring the right resources.
6. Overly controlling, restrictive, over pressuring	A parent who refuses to listen or fails to recognise how at times their child can be wrong. Parents who put too much pressure on their children. Parents can be too involved.

7. Blames teacher or other children for their child's faults/problems	A parent who doesn't take the time to find out what their child is learning and why they're learning it. Instead they blame the teacher for not teaching properly if their child isn't reaching their expectations that are too high.
8. Doesn't listen to teacher or child	Parents in denial of children's disruptive behaviours
9. A teacher (especially if a co-worker)	A teacher as a parent.