

**DEVELOPING BELIEFS AND CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF  
A BEGINNING TEACHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

Using a single case study methodology, the purpose of this research was to investigate how school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences influenced a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement. Literature was reviewed pertaining to teacher induction, teacher interactions with parents, the effects of culture on beliefs, and the importance of an individual's prior beliefs on future beliefs. The data for this study was obtained from three semi-structured interviews with a beginning teacher, single semi-structured interviews with the school's principal, vice principal, and an experienced teacher, reflections from cultures walks performed by the experienced teacher and the researcher, and document scans of division and school records. It was found that the most important experiences that influenced the beginning teacher's thinking about parents were her involvement in an undergraduate class focused on community and parent engagement, and her own experiences growing up with her parents. Other findings revealed that the beginning teacher needed further assistance in creating meaningful relationships with parents, the school culture had a limiting effect on the beginning teacher's growth, and that the weakest influences on the beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement could be attributed to her induction program. Implications include recommendations that beginning teachers have experience with parents off the school landscape, have access to professionals who successfully create parent-teacher relationships, and have taken a course focused on parent engagement during their undergraduate work. As well, a recommendation that school-based administrators receive parent engagement training is proposed. It is suggested that further research be done to understand the interplay between a beginning teacher's prior beliefs about parent engagement and different school cultures and induction programs.

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## **DEDICATION**

To those who have not yet found their voice; this work is for you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

When properly executed, teaching is a rewarding profession that provides a valued service to society. As Barth (2007) explains, when teachers create enduring intellectual passion in students, they have prepared students for the world they will be expected to face. However, learning to teach, effectively or otherwise, is a notoriously difficult undertaking (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Huling-Austin, 1992; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). While many other professions have supports to develop novice members of the profession, teachers have historically been welcomed to the ranks of teaching with a *sink or swim* mentality (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Molner-Kelley, 2004). It is common to find references in the literature to beginning teachers feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, unsupported, and insecure about their teaching abilities (Brock & Grady, 1998; Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, Rosenholtz, 1989).

Due partially to a lack of adequate support, retaining beginning teachers is an issue for many school divisions (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Molner-Kelley, 2004). When school divisions lose beginning teachers after a short period of time, costs soon become evident in a number of ways. There is the cost associated with training another individual to fill the vacated position, as well as the cost to the psyche of the remaining staff, as teachers see a colleague leave the profession unable to handle the stress and workload involved with teaching. Additionally, community relations can be damaged as it takes time to establish relationships with members of the community; a process made more difficult by continually introducing new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Beginning teachers confronting the harsh realities of learning to teach and deciding to leave the profession is only one of the potential negative outcomes. It appears that without proper provisions in place, beginning teachers are being put in jeopardy of experiencing delays or halts to the development of their professional abilities (Brock & Grady, 1998; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). The fear of being deemed professionally inadequate seems to prevent novice teachers from asking for help from experienced teachers; this may force novice teachers into situations where they adopt teaching strategies not because they increase student learning, but because the strategies are convenient and appear to be effective in managing student behaviours in the short term. In a profession largely viewed to be very isolating (Brock & Grady, 1998; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Huling-Austin, 1992), beginning teachers are able to easily avoid other teachers. As a result, isolated beginning teachers find it easier to stick to classroom practices that they have embraced, without having to justify student-learning results. If beginning teachers are allowed to choose avoidance instead of collaboration, without intervention from administrators or colleagues, beginning teachers' practices can become stagnant, with student achievement following suit (Angelle, 2006).

From the research done in the field of teacher induction, there presently exist numerous recommendations to deal with the issue of beginning teacher development. Researchers have advocated for lighter teaching loads, more opportunities for collaboration, and the use of either single or multiple mentors in order to help alleviate the stresses that are inherent in learning to teach (Brock & Grady, 1998; Danielson, 2002; Huling-Austin, 1992; Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Van Nuland, 2011; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Unfortunately recommended practices have yet to become the norm in many schools. One noteworthy reason that recommended practices have not been regularly instituted can be

attributed to the culture of the school where induction programs are being implemented (Angelle, 2006; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). It appears that no matter how well an induction program may have been designed, if the culture of the school is not supportive of the program, it is unlikely that the program will be successful (Huling-Austin, 1986). In schools where collaborative cultures exist, it appears that the aims of the induction program can be achieved, while those schools that have isolationist cultures will experience much less success (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008).

Similar to the effect of culture on induction programs, there is also research that demonstrates the importance of selecting appropriate mentors when implementing induction programs (Alhija & Fresko, 2010; Huling-Austin, 1992; Molner-Kelley, 2004; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Too often mentors are selected without careful consideration of the skill set they possess, or the support that mentors need in order to be successful (Brock & Grady, 1998; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). Likewise, there is research suggesting that attention should be paid to the attitudes and beliefs of mentors, as mentor attributes have an effect on the mentees with whom they work (Christensen, 2013, Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). It appears that the mentors' attitudes and beliefs are easily transferred to the beginning teacher, making it very important that the mentor's attitudes and beliefs are known before a decision about who might make an appropriate mentor is made.

While there are many things to which beginning teachers must attend as they start their careers, arguably one important component is how novice teachers develop effective relationships with parents. There are a number of researchers who argue that more attention needs to be paid to how teachers and schools engage parents in the education of their children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999; Lawson, 2003; Pushor,

2009, 2013). Researchers have called for increasing parent engagement education available to preservice teachers (Pushor, 2011, 2013), and support for established teachers (Jeynes, 2010; Mapp, 2003; Pushor, 2007, 2013; Shumow & Harris, 2000) in order to achieve increased parent engagement in schools. While this body of research and recommendations exist, similar to the recommendations for teacher induction programs, practice is slow to match theory (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Lawson, 2003; Mapp, 2003). In addition to the lack of implementation of research recommendations, there also appears to be a lack of literature involving recommendations specifically detailing how beginning teachers should go about establishing effective relationships with parents.

Though it would seem that there is a great deal of research concerning teacher induction, school culture, and parent engagement, there appears to be a need for further research specific to how beginning teachers develop beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding interactions with parents.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences influence a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement.

### **Research Questions**

The study focused on the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of a beginning teacher as she interacts with parents while she begins her career?
2. How do a beginning teacher's prior beliefs inform a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement?

3. How does school culture influence a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement?
4. How do teacher induction programs affect a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement?

### **Positionality**

The challenge faced by beginning teachers is an area in which I have been interested for a long period of time. When I began teaching, I did not possess the ability to truly analyze my situation; I was largely unaware of what skills I possessed and what skills I needed to develop. In other words, I did not realize what I did not know. I remember being primarily concerned with surviving the complexities of interacting with students, forming relationships with staff members, and attempting to understand the subjects I was assigned to teach, none of which were from my major or minor field of study. Added to this, I was involved in coaching extracurricular activities on a daily basis, for which I had volunteered; and supervising other extracurricular activities, to which I had been appointed. I no longer remember all the specific incidents over which I worried, but I do recall the feeling of being stressed about classroom management, the feeling of inadequacy in teaching unknown subjects, the anxiety at having to contact and interact with parents, and the general fatigue that accompanied many late evenings spent preparing for the following day. I did not possess the time or self-critiquing abilities to properly identify my own performance, but from the reports and feedback I received from my principal and superintendent it appeared to me that those around me deemed my first year largely successful. Yet that is not what I had experienced. I had felt, at various times and to various degrees, frustrated, tired, overwhelmed, and without support. I had a vague sense that, specifically, I should be better at what I did, and, generally, the process of beginning teaching should have been

less demanding. I did not know what to do about getting better as a teacher, or managing the demands that teaching placed upon me.

I recall preparing for my first set of parent-teacher interviews. What I now recall most acutely is my lack of consideration of the role the parents of the students I taught would or should play. I had been so concerned with doing my job of teaching students, a job that I had solely defined, that I had failed to even contemplate that parents had a role. To put the situation into context, I had no formal educational experiences on which I could draw; I had never had a class during my educational undergraduate work that focused on parent engagement, nor had parent engagement been a large component of my internship. I remember the date of parent-teacher interviews quickly approaching as the school year began, and as the date neared my anxiety increased. In the grade seven through twelve school where I found myself at the time, I felt that the dominant thinking was that parents were, at best, uninterested in the education of their children, and at worst, meddlesome and unsupportive of teachers' work. This was the thinking with which I entered my first set of parent-teacher interviews. As I recall the event, I now see that it was largely a positive experience. Most parents simply wanted to meet me, the newest teacher on staff, and to let me know that I could contact them should I run into any difficulty with their child. But even with this positive experience into formal teacher-parent interactions as the basis for relationships with the parents of my students, it did little to change the narrative in my head: parents were individuals of whom I should be wary. I held on to this belief as I transitioned through two other schools. In each community I entered, I had a cordial relationship with parents, yet I was not eager to have any sort of authentic relationship. I was of the opinion that we could, and should, operate largely independent of each other.

This thinking transformed when I changed schools for a third time, this time entering into a new role when I moved. I now currently find myself in the role of vice principal at a rural K-12 school. In this position, I am forced to interact with parents due to the demands of my role. I have to inform parents about incidents that have occurred with their child at school, call on parents for support with school initiatives, field parent queries and questions, and moderate conversations in which parents are involved. Through these experiences, my comfort level in dealing with parents has grown. Similarly, my appreciation for their role has increased.

I now see two issues that I believe should be addressed in K-12 education. First, in my role as administrator, I see the support and lack of support provided to individuals who are entering their teaching careers. With the experience gained as a teacher and administrator, I am now better positioned to fully understand the demands placed upon teachers as they enter the profession, and the supports we offer them to meet the demands of teaching and learning to teach. What I generally see is that in the schools where I have worked, we have made minimal gains. We still ask novice teachers to do a difficult job without giving them the supports necessary to be successful, both with developing their professional competencies and with managing their emotional health. I believe that school administrators have the responsibility to understand the situation faced by beginning teachers, and the power to influence the outcomes in more positive directions.

Secondly, I still see in teachers, especially those just entering the profession, the wariness of parents that I exhibited before my role change. It is these novice teachers, the ones who require support in a multitude of areas, who I feel could most benefit from having positive, authentic relationships with parents. In order to do this, I believe we need to understand when and how teacher wariness of parents develops, and what factors are influential in establishing



beginning teachers' attitudes and beliefs. If we can better understand this phenomenon than we can do a better job of changing the narrative. Once again, if school administrators can understand the forces at play in these situations, they can act in ways that will bring about positive change. I believe this will be beneficial not only for beginning teachers, but parents and students as well.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is extensive documentation regarding the difficulties that beginning teachers face as they transition into the profession (Angelle, 2006; Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Danielson, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1989; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). In response to this, a large body of research exists in the field of teacher induction, with recommendations on how beginning teachers' needs might be addressed (Brock & Grady, 1998; Huling-Austin, 1992; Montecinos et al., 2011; Van Nuland, 2011). The goals of these programs seem to be somewhat varied. While some programs seem to have as their goal teacher retention or teacher job satisfaction, there is a growing body of literature that advocates for teacher induction programs that have increased teacher performance, and ultimately increased student learning, as their main focus (Danielson, 2002, Huling-Austin, 1986; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). Similar to this, there is also ample literature about school culture and its effects on beginning teacher performance (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Huling-Austin, 1986; Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, & Pesenti, 2009; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). It seems evident that in an unsupportive culture, the goals of teacher induction programs will not be achieved.

Just as there is ample research in the field of teacher induction, so there also exists a similar volume of research involving parent engagement. Many experts appear to advocate for increasing parent voice in educational decisions that affect their children (Henderson & Mapp,

2002; Pushor, 2007, 2013; Uludag, 2008). The supporters of this course of action appear to believe that student achievement can be increased when meaningful parent engagement is realized (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004; Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011). The literature further explores ways in which teachers can be educated so that they will attempt to create authentic partnerships with parents (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2002; Jeynes, 2010; Pushor, 2011; Shumow & Harris, 2000). There appears to be researchers calling for more work to be done while teachers are at the preservice stage (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Pushor, 2011, 2013; Uludag, 2008); similarly there are recommendations to encourage veteran teachers to make the transition from parent disengagement to engagement (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Jeynes, 2010; Pushor, 2007, 2013).

While the amount of literature in the areas of teacher induction and parent engagement appears extensive, the amount of research specific to the needs of beginning teachers seems more limited. Likewise, there appears to be gaps in the research regarding the process new teachers experience as they form their beliefs and, ultimately, their practices regarding parent engagement. This study seeks to describe the influence of school culture, teacher induction programs, and beginning teachers' prior beliefs on beginning teachers as they develop their understanding of parent engagement. For this reason, this study will be of interest to administrators, or any other support personnel who have the responsibility of working with teachers new to the profession. Likewise, it may be of interest to those individuals or groups who are charged with the task of designing teacher induction programs for schools or school divisions, and those individuals responsible for undergraduate teacher education.

## **Definitions**

The following definitions are used throughout this study:

**Parent involvement:** activities where parents are invited to serve the agenda of the school; parents doing tasks that teachers deem to be important. Involvement activities are peripheral to the core work teaching and learning. Examples might include helping with a field trip or being an audience member at a school event (Pushor, 2007, 2010). Often parent involvement is used in the literature to denote both involvement and engagement activities.

**Parent engagement:** activities mutually determined by parents and teachers as being important for children. Engagement activities are integrally related to teaching and learning. Examples might include teachers and parents participating in mutually beneficial professional development together, or collaborating to develop a homework policy (Pushor, 2007, 2010). Many researchers include engagement activities within the term parent involvement, as opposed to differentiating between the two phrases.

**Teacher induction:** programs designed to bridge preservice and beginning teaching. Designed for those who have already completed basic training. May refer to activities such as workshops, mentoring, orientations, or seminars (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

## **Delimitations**

This study focused on the experiences of a beginning teacher who was in her first year of teaching. Data were collected from participants from the same school, with the school principal, vice principal and one other experienced teacher also participating. Select participants underwent interviews with semi-structured interview questions. Select participants also completed a culture walk to gather data on school culture. Data were collected during the 2013-2014 school year.

## **Limitations**

This study, as with all studies that rely on forthcoming participants, was limited by the participants' willingness to discuss their experiences related to parent engagement, and the depth to which they were willing to discuss the topic. As well, it was limited by the fact that stories volunteered by participants do not represent absolute truths, but rather the perceptions of reality offered by the storyteller. Each individual's report of the culture of the school was limited to his/her specific interpretation and therefore did not necessarily reflect the dominant view in the school. The researcher's role at the time of the research was an in-school administrator, which may also have been a barrier, and although ethical assurances were provided to all research participants, some contributors may not have felt free to offer their true remembrances for fear of judgment or repercussions. The researcher also had the responsibility of ensuring that reported findings did or could not negatively impact the beginning teacher's future career prospects or any other research participant; this limited what could be reported.

## **Assumptions**

The researcher makes the following assumptions:

1. School culture has an effect on the beliefs and practices of those individuals who are part of the school.
2. Beginning teachers carry with them prior experiences and beliefs that shape their understanding of new events and interactions.
3. Beginning teachers carry some expectations of parents' roles in education before entering the profession.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters as follows: Chapter One details the research problem and research questions, while also examining the positionality of the researcher. Definitions, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are also presented. Chapter Two is a summary of pertinent research literature including such topics as parent engagement, the reality of being a beginning teacher, the effects of culture, the importance of beginning teachers' prior beliefs, and teacher induction programs. Chapter Three is a summation of the research design and the methodology used within the study. Chapter Four is a presentation of the data collected during the research investigation, organized by theme. Chapter Five is a discussion and analysis of the findings resulting from the data collected, as they pertain to the research questions. Implications and suggestions for future study are also included in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Appreciating how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement encompasses a number of different elements. In this chapter, research concerning teacher interactions with parents, the realities of being a beginning teacher, the effect of culture, the role of prior beliefs, and the effects of induction programs on beginning teachers are presented.

#### **Teacher Interactions with Parents**

Teaching is a profession that requires teachers to have daily interactions with students. Because of this, a great deal of focus is placed upon the interactions that occur between students and teachers, and deservedly so. But students are not the sole group attended to by the teaching profession; teachers often give their attention to parents as well as students. The challenge for teachers is finding the appropriate amounts and types of interactions with parents.

#### **Parent Involvement and Engagement**

Within the research literature, the terms parent involvement and parent engagement appear to be used interchangeably. Research is published that notes a distinction between the terms parent involvement and parent engagement (Pushor, 2007, 2010, 2013). Parent involvement is defined as activities where parents are invited to serve the agenda of the school. When parents are involved they contribute by performing tasks that teachers deem to be important. Involvement activities are peripheral to the core work of teaching and learning. Examples of parent involvement might include helping with a field trip, making items for a bake sale, or being an audience member at a school event. In contrast, parent engagement is defined as activities mutually determined by parents and teachers as being important for children.

Engagement activities are integrally related to teaching and learning. Examples of parent engagement might include teachers and parents participating in mutually beneficial professional development together, or developing a homework policy (Pushor, 2007, 2010, 2013). This research study observes Pushor's distinction between parent involvement and parent engagement; when noted in this study, the terms are used intentionally.

### **Parent Engagement Benefits**

There are ample advocates of parent engagement and involvement in school because of the benefits to teachers, parents, and students that result from parent-teacher partnerships. When school, families, and communities work together to support the learning of children, there appears to be student academic gains (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004; Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011). Gains in achievement are seen regardless of the background or income level of the students involved. Involved and engaged families have children who earn higher grades, stay in school longer, like school more, and are more likely to pass classes and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills; demonstrate improved behaviour; graduate; and attend post-secondary institutions (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) studied parent participation factors including: frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-teacher interactions, participation in education activities at home, and participation in school activities. From the parent participation factors studied, parent participation in educational activities at home was the strongest predictor for student academic achievement. The authors hypothesized that this means that schools can improve the academic performances of their students by enhancing parents' abilities to foster and support their children's learning at home. This perhaps explains the results from Redding, Langdon, Meyer,

and Sheley's (2004) study involving high poverty schools. The authors reported that 129 schools, all of which had implemented a common set of parent-engagement strategies over a two year period, enjoyed statistically significant student learning gains in statewide assessments as compared to both a control group of schools and the state performance in general. Another explanation for increased student achievement may be that parents who are on the school landscape have the opportunity to establish positive relationships with teachers. These positive relationships, in turn, may positively influence the teacher's opinions of their child, and therefore the child's performance at school (Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011).

Aside from increasing students' academic achievement, parent engagement has other positive effects. It has been argued that creating a positive parent-child-school partnership could be beneficial in that it communicates to the child that education is important (Uludag, 2008). Likewise, effective parent-teacher partnerships allow both parent and teacher knowledge to be shared and recognized as legitimate. When parent and teacher knowledge is recognized as legitimate it can lead to the creation of healthy partnerships between parents and schools (Lawson, 2003). As well, if there are established relationships between schools and parents, it becomes much more likely that parents will support reforms involving their child's education. When reforms are being implemented in situations where positive relationships exist between teachers and parents, parents are more apt to feel the reforms are being undertaken in an attempt to ensure that all parties are working to make children successful, as opposed to being mandated by the school (Shumow, 1997). The resulting partnership developed between home and school ultimately promotes collaboration and shared responsibility between teachers and parents (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). The benefits that result from collaboration and shared responsibility between parents and teachers include teachers' increased feelings of empowerment, and parents'



increased valuing of their parent knowledge. Teachers appear to feel empowered as they realize they are capable of changing students' lives for the better, while parents seem to value their roles in helping to meaningfully shape the education of their child (Kroeger & Lash, 2011).

### **The Gap between Knowledge and Practice**

While much is published about the benefits of parent engagement, there is still a difference between what is known to be beneficial and the practices that routinely occur within schools (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Lawson, 2003; Mapp, 2003). Even though there has been an emphasis on increasing authentic parent-school partnerships, there has also been frustration on all sides in trying to create meaningful relationships. Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) noted that as children age and progress through their schooling, there is a decline in the number and availability of activities that enable parents to attend the school. Likewise, they reported that as students progress through school, there is also a decline in the quality of parent-teacher interactions. Declining parent-teacher interactions can become an issue as the greater the communicative distance between parents and school, the more standardized the treatment of students appears to become. The increased distance between parents and teachers has the tendency to lead to less effective and personalized solutions for the students' problems (Rosenholtz, 1989), which likely explains why students with involved parents experience greater academic gains (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

### **School Sets the Agenda**

The failure to act in the best interest of students and implement effective parent engagement in some ways can be attributed to constraints at the school level of organization. One issue appears to be that most parent involvement is composed of parents carrying out tasks that the school has determined are important, with no input from parents. The activities in which

parents are involved solely serve the agenda of the school. The reason that parents tolerate having their roles dictated to them by the school likely owes to historical developments between parents and the education system. Cutler (2000) detailed how American schools have evolved from institutions under the control of parents to under the control of school officials. During the 1850s, middle class mothers began to focus more on nurturing their young, while the urban poor seemed to be falling behind. To combat this, school officials took on more of the parents' responsibilities; here we see the seedlings of a deficit view of parents. As time progressed, Cutler noted that schools took over more and more functions that would have typically lain in the domain of parents, with the result being that parents became marginalized and parents (especially immigrants, minorities, or those of low socioeconomic status) were viewed as having deficits. This state of affairs led to school officials welcoming only the types of parent involvement that they deemed appropriate or acceptable. It is from this historical context that many parents take their cues about what their roles should entail with the school system.

When parents are positioned in such a way that they serve an agenda created by the school, the result is that parents do not feel like partners in education (Murphy & Pushor, 2004). Pushor (2012) noted that much of this can be attributed to schools acting as protectorates. In a protectorate, the strong take charge in order to protect the weak because they believe the weak incapable of protecting themselves. With good intentions, schools have used their expert knowledge to determine the agenda of the school in isolation from parents and the community. In order for effective parent-school relationships to develop, the dominant thinking, that teachers have a monopoly on educational knowledge, must be challenged. Without changing the protectorate thinking, parents will likely continue to be largely positioned as outsiders to the school, and be viewed by teachers as possibly demanding, interfering, or needy (Pushor, 2009).

One of the reasons that the school is able to set the agenda is because typically teacher knowledge is communicated to parents as being important; the result is that power is held at the school level (Pushor, 2009). It follows that those parents and community members who are not well positioned on the school landscape are subject to the decisions, policies, and practices of the teachers. In the event that a parent does not agree with a course of action taken by school personnel, the parent is in a situation where little to no support is available to them; the result is that the parent is marginalized. As noted by Lawson (2003), parent marginalization consists of teachers defining, and schools limiting, parent involvement. It appears that parent engagement is largely limited by the quality of interactions that parents experience with their child's school (Daniels & Shumow, 2003), and in cultures where interactions are of poor quality or parents feel they have limited roles, teachers struggle to get meaningful parent involvement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Ashton and Cairney (2001) found that parents were being devalued and stated that many attempts to involve parents in education are tokenistic. They cited reasons for tokenism involving parents. The foremost reason was that schools largely define what parent involvement looks like within schools; parent involvement is controlled by the school with little to no input from the parents.

### **Using Language to Exclude**

One of the ways that schools avoid allowing parents the opportunity to create or influence the agenda of the school is through the usage of language. Often language and practices that differ from the school's preferred standards are devalued and negated by school personnel (Kroeger & Lash, 2011). Specifically, Ashton and Cairney (2001) noted that teachers and administrators accomplish the feat of solely setting the agenda by sharing only a small amount of information with parents; the information is usually carefully selected so as not to be

controversial or debatable. Too often, the result is that parent queries are stifled and opportunities for parents to be invited into meaningful dialogue are missed. The practice of stifling parents is unlikely to change with the addition of new teaching staff, as teachers appear to echo the dominant culture within a school. Furthermore, in many instances the dominant thinking in a school is based upon lies. Ashton and Cairney argued that the process of spreading lies is largely done through the use of language and dialogue that is established as taken-for-granted within the school. The dialogue that occurs becomes so entrenched within schools that it holds uncontested power. As a result, negotiability is stifled, leaving those outside the decision-making group of the school (parents) with little room to maneuver or protest. When schools are the sole controllers of the dialogue, they largely control the way people think. This means that all those who are not able to engage in the dialogue are disadvantaged. The result is that there then becomes great difficulty when attempting to create authentic parent-school partnerships. The outcome is that most attempted parent-school partnerships are solely defined and regulated by the school, and therefore are not authentic partnerships.

If marginalization is allowed to go unchecked, there develops a widespread belief that parents should not interfere in the education of their children, as it simply is not their business (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). Ashton and Cairney noted in their research that parents feel the open door policy at their school is a farce, and in reality the door is only open to parents when the school allows it to be. This is similar to the findings of Fine (1987) who argued that schools are very skilled at silencing. Through the books used, the curriculum generated, the withholding of information, the methods used to evaluate school personnel, and the instructional strategies used, schools create barriers between the worlds of school and home. Fine argued that this serves to make it very difficult for the values of families to be represented at school, and effectively makes

irrelevant the lived experiences, passions, concerns, and worldviews of families and communities, especially those of low-income and minority students.

### **Lack of Institutional Support**

Parent engagement with their children's school is also limited by the amount of support the topic of parent engagement gets within schools. Shumow and Harris (2000) noted that there is little institutional support to involve parents in education, as often there is not adequate time, money, or resources available to enable teachers to attend to the issue. They further noted that opportunities for novice teachers to be involved in educational courses focusing on parent engagement are rare. In their study, they found that 10 of 12 teachers had no formal training to work with parents, while one teacher had taken a class, and the remaining teacher had been in attendance at one workshop. Lack of professional development for teachers in parent engagement policies and practices, whether it is at the preservice or professional level, sends the message to all that parent engagement is unimportant (Uludag, 2008). Unfortunately the teacher training that is available is often poor or distorted (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). As evidence of this, Pushor (2009, 2011) stated that of Schwab's four commonplaces in the curriculum (learners, teachers, subject matter, and milieu), milieu, which includes attention to areas such as family, community, ethnicity and class, is very under-represented in teacher education courses. Pushor (2013) further noted that Schwab felt that all the commonplaces should be coordinated, and that none should be subordinated or super-ordinated. She found that teachers continue to enter the teaching profession without any experience or opportunities to develop any beliefs or practices about creating relationships with parents. Pushor (2011) argued that with no curriculum upon which to fall back, teachers adopt the unchallenged belief that parents are outsiders to school, and, perhaps, individuals of whom they should be fearful or wary.

## **Teacher Beliefs and Assumptions**

Compounding concerns present at the school and system level are issues that can be found at the teacher level of organization. Research demonstrates that staff conversations are reflective of the values and beliefs that staff members hold of parents and families (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). Often teacher conversations, and the actions that result, show that teachers attempt to use parent involvement initiatives to persuade parents to adopt views that are aligned with the teachers' views. Embedded within this course of action is the assumption that the beliefs, views, and knowledge of parents is inferior to that of teachers and therefore needs to be challenged and changed (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). A number of researchers have termed the assumption that parent knowledge is inferior to teacher knowledge a deficit view of parents (Lawson, 2003; Murphy & Pushor, 2004; Shumow & Harris, 2000). In a study conducted by Shumow and Harris (2000), it was found that none of the 12 teachers involved could identify any skills or knowledge that parents or community members might possess that would be beneficial to the students the teachers taught or the teachers' educational program. Daniels and Shumow (2002) reported that teachers are likely to attribute differences in student academic performance to differing family environments as opposed to assigning any blame to what instructional practices occurred in the classroom. It would appear that teachers believe poor student academic performance is the result of parent practices, not teaching methods.

Another belief that some teachers seem to hold is that declining parent involvement as students age is a result of parents' laziness, disinterest in the lives of their children, or both (Mills & Gale, 2004). Similar to this, Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) noted that in the United States of America lower parent involvement is interpreted by teachers to mean that the parents do not care; the authors noted that this US understanding is not shared within all cultures. In some

cultures parents do not get actively involved on the school landscape because the cultural expectation is that parents have ultimate trust in the teacher; any demonstrations by the parents to the contrary would be seen as disrespectful. In this way, the cultural norms of immigrant families to America put them at a disadvantage because many teachers interpret these actions (or inactions) to mean that these parents are lazy or do not care about the education of their children.

Additional research involving teachers' perceptions of parent engagement give further evidence of teacher attitudes and beliefs. Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) stated that beginning teachers have the expectation that parent relationships will be challenging. Beginning teachers appear to assume that conflict with parents is evident, even though many beginning teachers have yet to experience any parent-teacher interactions. The authors explained that many beginning teachers were not looking to create partnerships with parents, and in fact possessed a mindset where they felt they had to educate in spite of the parents of their students. It would appear that parents are often cast as the antagonists in the story of school; teachers believe that parents are interfering with the teacher's role of educating students (Murphy & Pushor, 2004). Similarly, Pushor (2013) reported that many pre-service teachers also hold negative attitudes about parents and feel that they will have to tolerate parents when they begin teaching. Often, teachers have the expectation that if parents are involved with the school, it should solely be to help the teacher with tasks determined by the teacher (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Lawson (2003) observed this as well and noted that teachers see parent-involvement as school-centric and have no interest in helping parents solely for the purpose of helping parents; teachers want to involve parents so that the teacher's tasks will become easier.

Teachers' beliefs regarding parent engagement manifest themselves in the expectations that teachers hold for parents. Some teachers believe that parents are responsible to initiate

communicate with the school, while also feeling that teachers do not need to reciprocate this action (Daniels & Shumow, 2003). Likewise many teachers believe that parents are responsible for the social and emotional needs of their children, while teachers are solely responsible for the academic domain of the students; this is further evidence of teachers' school-centric view, a view that welcomes parent involvement so long as the outcome benefits the teacher. As evidence of this teacher school-centric view, Murphy and Pushor (2004) noted that many teachers feel there are some parents that they do not need to see because the child is doing well in school. The implication of this view is that there are parents with whom teachers do not need to create a partnership.

### **Other Teacher Factors Affecting Teacher-Parent Interactions**

There are two other noteworthy factors regarding parent engagement for teachers. The experience level of a teacher influences what types of barriers the teacher might experience. If teachers are inexperienced, they are prone to giving up easily as they get discouraged and lack confidence in their abilities to affect change. On the other hand, experienced teachers can sometimes be reluctant to fully engage in creating parent partnerships because of past negative experiences involving parents. As well, teachers of any experience level who struggle to find a comfort level with "typical" families will often experience even greater distress when dealing with non-typical families (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). Additionally, Lawson (2003) stated teachers may lack ownership, be resentful, or be skeptical of mandated parent engagement programs they had no hand in creating or selecting, and are simply imposed upon them by an administrator, school, or school division.



## **Parent Demographic and Logistic Considerations**

Beyond factors that can be attributed to the school or teacher, there are other issues that restrict parent-school partnerships; often these issues are related to parent demographics. It has been shown that language barriers exist for many families, which impact their ability to interact with school personnel (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). In addition, families with low-income status, parents who are immigrant or non-white, and parents with low levels of education often have significantly less involvement at school; in contrast gender and race do not appear to be predictors of parents' involvement at school (Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011).

Other barriers for parents are logistical. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) deepened the findings that low-income families are less involved at school. The authors noted that socio-economic status (SES) does not easily explain parent involvement levels; instead it is the factors associated with low SES that are responsible for low parent involvement levels. Factors common in low SES families, such as inflexible working conditions, less familiarity with the school system owing to the fact that most of these parents have less schooling, and lower access to family supports, lead to less parent involvement. Lawson (2003) reported that parents are also often marginalized on the school landscape, as meeting times are inconvenient for parents, making their attendance difficult. Teachers, noting the lack of parent attendance at meetings, feel justified in believing that parents do not care about the education of their children. When this occurs, Lawson contended that parents who are marginalized by the school have no appropriate avenue to add their voice, so the only options are to remain silent or become confrontational. If parents chose the former course of action, relationships with teachers do not develop, and should parents choose the latter option the only relationship created is a negative one. Another result of inconvenient meeting times is that those few parents who are able to

attend meetings are vastly outnumbered and therefore have a very difficult time getting their views heard (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). Aside from the inconvenient times, many parents have other commitments to which they must attend, making meeting with teachers extremely difficult (Mills & Gale, 2004). These other commitments often include work (Uludag, 2008), structural restraints (such as scheduling), interfamily commitments (such as finding childcare), and personal issues (such as access to a vehicle) (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). One other issue for parents is their own expertise in educational theory (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). In order for participants to engage in educational debate, the participants require complex prior knowledge to feel comfortable. Parents are often overwhelmed with the amount of knowledge in which they need to be versed, while teachers do not feel that parents have a place in these meetings and discussions due to their ignorance of specific educational theory or practice. As a result, most parents are left feeling uncomfortable attempting to engage in debate with educators (Shumow, 1997).

### **Parent Beliefs**

Parent beliefs also create barriers to parent engagement. Parent beliefs are varied; parents may carry past negative experiences of school that shapes their views, or parents may find themselves without the appropriate skills (language skills, as an example) to feel comfortable dealing with teachers. Additionally, parents commonly hold the belief that teachers know what is best, and that the principal's voice is the only one that truly matters. The latter factor leads to parent apathy (Mills & Gale, 2004). Some parents are hesitant to get involved with their children's teacher, as they believe that their children will view this as a negative and the children will actively campaign their parents to prevent the parents from getting involved (Lawson, 2003). Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) found that higher levels of school SES were

associated with higher levels of parent engagement at school. While higher levels of parent engagement confirm the results reported above by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie hypothesized that higher levels of engagement occur because higher SES parents believe that education is important for their children, and are confident in their belief that parents should be involved in the school. Furthermore, the authors suggested that high SES parents believe they are partners with their child's school, and feel confident that their input is both valuable and desirable. Parents with low SES do not share these beliefs.

A final parent belief that seems to influence parent engagement in schools involves parents' views of their rightful place in education. It appears that the beliefs of many parents around their role in their child's education largely determine whether or not they get involved. Parent beliefs regarding parents' roles are defined by parents' efficacy in their ability to help their children learn, parents' beliefs about how children learn, the role parents play in this process, and parents' past experiences with schools (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). Unfortunately there is often a difference in worldviews between teachers and parents regarding parents' roles in education. Many parents get involved because they see the school as community-centric, while teachers see parent involvement in the school as a school-centric activity. This creates situations where parents have the expectation that schools will provide value for the community and community members, while teachers are uninterested in helping parents just for the sake of helping parents; most teachers seem willing to work with parents if they feel that this process will benefit them as teachers (Lawson, 2003).

### **Teacher Supports**

Even though many barriers exist to creating meaningful school-parent partnerships, there is evidence to suggest that positive parent engagement outcomes can be attained if teachers are

given the appropriate support and resources. The additions of professional development, appropriate resources (as an example, access to phones in order to conveniently get in touch with parents), and time have all been suggested as necessary supports for teachers to create and maintain successful parent-teacher partnerships (Shumow & Harris, 2000).

There are also recommendations for work to be done to educate teachers in understanding that parent engagement can occur off the school landscape. Lawson (2003) identified that both parents who are uninvolved and those who are involved on the school landscape saw themselves as actively involved in their children's education. Parents who are not involved at school reported that they do many things at home to support their children's education. In support of this, Shumow, Lyutykh, and Schmidt (2011) reported that parents from marginalized families are involved at home to a similar extent when compared with wealthy families at the same grade level.

Aside from supports to help teachers redefine involved parents, there is also literature about the importance of teacher efficacy and teachers' perceptions of parents' abilities. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones and Reed (2002) reported that teachers are much more willing to attempt meaningful parent-teacher relationships when professional development for teachers attends to two areas: work needs to be done to increase teacher efficacy, and support is required to increase teacher perceptions of parents' efficacy for helping children learn at home. When teachers believe in their own abilities and feel that parents are capable of affecting positive outcomes, they are more likely to try to establish relationships with parents. Historically, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) reported that higher levels of teacher efficacy are associated with higher levels of parent involvement at school. They argued that increases in teacher confidence also increase professionalism, which in turn leads teachers to be more open to

discussing programs and goals with parents. The result of more open teacher discussion with parents is parents getting better information from teachers, which causes parents to see their participation in their children's education as valuable and worthy of the cost of time it takes to have a relationship with their children's teachers. The authors also noted that teachers with high efficacy seem to believe that parent participation complements their educational program, while those low-efficacious teachers might see asking parents for input as an example of teacher inadequacy.

There are also suggestions in the literature that more attention could be paid to educating teachers about the subtle aspects of parent engagement. Jeynes (2010) argued that once educators understand the importance of subtle aspects, teachers should work with parents to help them understand the importance of these aspects. The author found that when parents openly communicate with their children and develop a culture in the home where education is valued, this has a greater impact on student achievement than any other activities that parents might do. Jeynes argued that school personnel should develop a more sophisticated view of parent engagement that is not solely defined by how often parents attend school functions. Parent engagement is more often about subtle displays of love and respect. Likewise, creating a supportive scholarly environment in the home has larger and longer lasting positive effects than attending school events and checking homework, both of which have some impact but only last for a brief period of time. In this way, the spirit of the actions of parents may be more important than the actual pedagogy used. Jeynes demonstrated the need for parents to create a loving and respectful environment, while balancing this with behavioural boundaries and enforcement of those boundaries. Similarly, Jeynes noted that teachers should adopt the same loving and supportive environment created by parents; when teachers employ loving and supporting

strategies children demonstrate higher academic achievement. Finally, Jeynes argued that it is the job of teachers and school administrators to educate parents about the importance of subtle aspects of parent engagement, while at the same time creating empathic, warm, and caring environments that are inviting to parent input and involvement; if not, parent partnerships are unlikely to develop.

Within the literature there are recommendations for what preservice teachers require in order to be prepared to effectively create positive parent-teacher relationships. Pushor (2011, 2013) advocated including a curriculum of parents to be part of teacher education programs, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This curriculum would include an examination of who is seen to hold power in schools, whose knowledge is valued, where parents are seen and where they are not, and who decides what in schools. From the experiences provided in the curriculum of parents, preservice teachers would develop philosophies (and corresponding practices) of parent engagement that address using parent knowledge alongside teacher knowledge in educational decisions, re-conceptualizing school in the context of family and community, and the teacher's role within the community. There are also calls for more specific skills to be included in teacher education programs. It appears that preservice teachers need to be explicitly told that parent engagement is important and to be exposed to the research supporting this statement. As well, preservice teachers appear to benefit from observing existing partnerships with parents while preservice teachers are involved (or even before their involvement) in field experiences. Also, preservice teachers could to be taught conflict resolution training and effective communication skills in order to be adequately prepared to begin teaching (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). In addition, it is recommended that preservice teachers be provided guidance and recommendations on how to deal with parents,

while at the same time increasing field experiences to better prepare these individuals for the challenges they will encounter as teachers (Uludag, 2008). Finally, there would appear to be benefits in having preservice teachers listen to parents and view them as having knowledge and skills, learn interviewing skills, and enter communities that go beyond their typical experiences (Kroeger & Lash, 2011).

### **Recommended Teacher Actions**

While a general call for more professional development and resources to aid teachers currently exists, there also appears to be more specific recommendations for teacher actions that will help to increase parent engagement. Henderson and Mapp (2002) suggested teacher outreach gestures are related to strong and consistent gains in both reading and mathematics. Teacher outreach gestures include: teachers meeting face to face with parents, teachers sending materials home, and teachers keeping in touch with parents about progress occurring at school. In addition, Henderson and Mapp contended that higher performing schools have teachers who focus on building trusting collaborative relationships with parents, recognize and respect families' needs and cultural differences, and embrace partnerships with parents where both power and responsibility are shared. Likewise, Mapp (2003) reported that parents want to be involved in their child's education when staff take the time to respect parents and recognize them as partners. Teachers can do this by recognizing the inaccuracy of the belief that parents do not care, recognizing that family involvement in education comes in many different forms, and understanding that the school plays a vital role in cultivating family engagement. Specifically, Mapp suggested that teachers should understand that educators must be welcoming to parents, honouring of parent knowledge, and connect with parents around the shared, meaningful goal of improving teaching and learning for all children; these actions will help to build a relationship

grounded in trust. Pushor (2007) further developed this thinking and suggested that teachers adopt the dual role of “guest-host.” In this position, teachers act as guests when they acknowledge their need to learn about the community, people, and the context of the school; go off the school landscape to where parents can be found to create relationships with parents; and honour the ways that parents support their children’s learning while off the school landscape. Teacher act as hosts when they extend invitations multiple times in multiple ways, encourage parents to form networks, and ensure that all guests know each other and feel comfortable. Through these actions, teachers have the opportunity to create meaningful partnerships with parents. Further to this, Pushor stated that teacher beliefs and assumptions regarding parents are critical in determining how parents get positioned within the school. She further noted that making these teacher beliefs and assumptions visible and explicit is vitally important in creating an alternate view of parents, where parents are no longer peripheral to schools and viewed by educators solely as supports to teachers.

The way teachers define professionalism also has an effect on parent engagement. Mills and Gale (2004) suggested that teachers would do well to redefine their professionalism as emergent as opposed to one based upon their knowledge base. They stated that emergent professionalism would have teachers strive to demonstrate the capacity to listen, learn from, and move forward with the communities and families they serve. A teacher’s ability to listen, learn, and progress would encapsulate professionalism instead of the old paradigm where professionalism is demonstrated by holding all the pertinent information. Grumet (2009) noted that the old knowledge-holding paradigm is a failure to properly define professionalism. She argued that allowing knowledge to be idealized is one of the ways in which the separation that exists between many teachers and families is reinforced. One way to demonstrate an emergent



definition of professionalism is for teachers to adopt a questioning stance when interacting with parents, as opposed to a more typical expert-based approach. By adhering to this more open questioning practice, parents will feel valued and teachers' reflective thinking will be better facilitated, which will in turn enables teachers to make better decisions and take better actions (Kroeger & Lash, 2011).

Regardless of the specific approach employed to establish parent engagement, there is a need to increase not only the quantity, but also the quality of parent-teacher interactions in order to create positive relationships; simply increasing the amount of interactions will do little to address any lacking parent engagement a school might encounter (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). As an example, parent involvement at school is significantly improved when specific invitations from teachers are issued to parents, as opposed to having a passive open-door policy (Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011). Invitations can come to parents through the climate of the school, directly from teachers, and either implicitly or explicitly from students. Inviting parents into schools can be accomplished by having principals that create welcoming environments, training staff on developing relationships with parents, communicating to parents that they have a role in their child's education, and extending invitations that are respectful of each families' particular situation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Quality interactions may also occur when teachers direct parents, based on roles that parents embrace. This means that teachers can help engage parents in the education of their children by directing parents to meet the children's daily learning needs, a practice that matches the parents' reported views of their preferred role within the education system (Shumow, 1997).

## **The Realities of Being a Beginning Teacher**

While interacting with parents is an expectation of fulltime teachers of all experience levels, there is little mention above of the specific issues novice teachers face as they begin their careers. Like any profession, entering as a novice has a number of challenges and opportunities. There is typically a vast difference in the skills and abilities of novice and experienced teachers. These differences must be considered when studying how beginning teachers come to develop an understanding of parent engagement.

### **Difficult Beginnings**

Teaching is considered to be a very challenging endeavor that requires years of practice to fully master (Doyle 1988, as cited in Huling-Austin, 1992). The challenges inherent in teaching, which are felt by teachers of all experience levels, are only exacerbated for those novices just learning the profession. Many first year teachers are not only given the most difficult workloads to perform and classes with which to work, but also have very limited professional resources and skills to help them as they work with challenging students (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989). Likewise, first year teachers are often asked to perform up to the same standards as experienced teachers while they attempt to learn the job (Angelle, 2006; Danielson, 2002; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). This creates situations where new teachers have little hope of being successful, leading to feelings of incompetence, lack of confidence, and frustration from their perceived inability to produce positive differences in the lives of their students (Rosenholtz, 1989). What is more, in addition to the classroom workload, many beginning teachers are tasked with extracurricular activities that likely delay the often much needed development of their teaching skills (Huling-Austin, 1992). This is likely why

Brock and Grady (1998) reported that the workload of first year teachers is often overwhelming, and causes many novice teachers to feel inadequate and isolated.

### **Retention Issues**

The stresses inherent in being a novice teacher have consequences. One consequence is high turnover rates among beginning teachers, with the ultimate consequence that organizational stability, coherence, and morale are negatively affected. High turnover rates inhibit the development and maintenance of effective learning communities. In turn, this lack of a strong learning community has a pronounced negative effect on the retention of new teachers, thereby creating a vicious cycle (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). In short, the burden of working with difficult students, instructing large classes, and having multiple preparations put teachers in situations where they leave the profession (Danielson, 2002).

### **Insufficient Preparation**

One of the reasons that beginning teachers do not understand the realities of being a professional teacher can be attributed to their education programs (Danielson, 2002). Many education programs involve a great deal of observation. Unfortunately, watching teachers teach does not adequately prepare one to actually teach. It has been argued that beginning teachers must be able to explain why the content they teach is important, know what strategies must be employed, and understand the importance of sequencing. None of the aforementioned skills can be accomplished without the aid of competent mentors and university instruction, because left to their own devices, beginning teachers are unlikely to gain these needed skills (Danielson, 2002).

Montecinos et al. (2011) examined the mismatch in thinking between novice teachers and their teacher education programs. The authors stated that there is an assumption within many teacher education programs that theory must be learned before practice is attempted. From their

study, Montecinos et al. argued that this philosophy does not meet the reported needs of beginning teachers who are much more focused on learning practical teaching skills. Because of this, once beginning teachers enter the field as novices, they are looking to meet this unaddressed need to learn practical teaching skills and as a result may adopt convenient teaching strategies that are ineffective. The authors contended that teacher education programs are not preparing beginning teachers with the practical skills they need in order to survive as novices, thereby denying them the opportunity to develop more appropriate teaching strategies. The hope would be that beginning teachers continue to grow and learn as professionals during their induction years, but Montecinos et al. suggested that growth might not be occurring for many novice teachers.

### **Limited Supports**

As a further complication for novice teachers, the teaching profession has not historically had induction programs that are often associated with other white-collar professions (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Molner-Kelley, 2004). Other professions such as residents in medicine, interns in architecture, and associates in law, offer assistance to novices as they transition into the profession, while typically new teachers have been expected to find their own way with little to no support or guidance on how this might be accomplished. Also unlike medical interns, who understand that their job will be very demanding and complex in the beginning, novice teachers rarely believe that teaching will be difficult as a novice (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). This creates a situation where their expectations and the realities of teaching are very different, and leads to difficulties for the beginning teacher.

There are other issues of note for beginning teachers. One of great concern is that beginning teachers' feelings of inadequacy create unhealthy situations where beginning teachers

spend a disproportionate amount of time attending to classroom management issues instead of learning to teach in ways that improve student learning (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Additionally, many novice teachers find themselves in environments where they are unable to develop into effective teachers. If beginning teachers do not receive adequate support and guidance, they will often hang on to the first teaching strategy that they find useful for their immediate needs (to survive) and refrain from changing throughout their careers. The coping strategy adopted by the beginning teacher might not be particularly effective for increasing student learning, since the primary purpose for employing the strategy is to help the beginning teacher cope with the pressures and stresses of learning to teach (Brock & Grady, 1998). As well, teaching has been noted as a notoriously isolating activity (Brock & Grady, 1998; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Huling-Austin, 1992). The isolation experienced by teachers makes it easy for novice teachers to adopt and persist in using classroom practices regardless of whether these practices are validated or invalidated by the student learning occurring, or not occurring, in the classroom. As a further issue, if novice teachers begin with ineffective practices, these individuals will typically either become ineffective teachers, or experience an internal conflict that will lead to frustration and ultimately, burnout (Angelle, 2006).

### **Fear of Inadequacy**

Aside from hardships imposed upon beginning teachers, these individuals also face difficulties that arise from their own self-doubts. Rosenholtz (1989) noted that beginning teachers have not historically had a strong foundation for their own professional competence. Because of this, when questions develop about their teaching capabilities, novice teachers will shy away from asking for help in an attempt to avoid having to disclose their perceived inadequacies. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many schools already have isolated

working conditions where it is common for colleagues to avoid conversations about instructional matters, especially those that involve offering professional advice about improving teaching methods or skills. Rosenholtz argued that isolation occurs at least partially because teachers want to protect their ego and self-esteem. This leads teachers to avoid situations where it may become publically or privately evident that they have a lack of professional ability. Similar findings note that beginning teachers often struggle to cope with the vulnerability arising from their limited competence, and struggle to cope with visibility; many beginning teachers have a fear of performing in front of parents or colleagues (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, and Quinlan (2001) also found evidence of avoidance among beginning teachers, especially when they feel a lack of emotional or psychological safety. It was stated that the typical response beginning teachers exhibit is to close their classroom doors and experiment in isolation hoping to find solutions to the problems they encounter. Too often the result of this is that novice teachers adopt survival techniques that help them endure their beginning years but do little to produce the kind of productive learning environments in which students deserve to be educated. The authors also noted that colleagues, who attempt to coerce beginning teachers by telling them what to do and how to do it instead of supporting them, often end up further isolating the novice teacher. The beginning teachers then end up trying to play it safe behind closed doors and avoid contact with other colleagues.

### **General Recommendation for Beginning Teachers**

There are several notable suggestions in the research literature intended to aide beginning teachers. Given the amount of time it takes beginning teachers to reach professional competence, Huling-Austin (1992) recommended a differentiation in expectations for beginning teachers. The suggestion is that beginning teachers not be expected to perform the same duties or have the

same responsibilities as experienced teachers. While currently Canadian teaching jurisdictions require all teachers to be held to the same standard regardless of teaching experience, some districts outside of Canada have different expectations based upon experience (Van Nuland, 2011). Similar to this, it is recommended that school principals ensure that beginning teachers have lightened workloads so that they can focus on preparation and attending to classroom organization (Brock & Grady, 1998). Huling-Austin also suggested that principals ensure that beginning teachers do not have multiple preparations since it causes stress for the beginning teacher, increases the chances the students will suffer from the beginning teacher's lack of preparation, and negates the opportunity for the beginning teacher to learn from teaching the same material numerous times. Huling-Austin further stated that beginning teachers should have frequent opportunities to network with other first-year teachers to problem solve and provide support for each other. Montecinos et al. (2011) noted that teachers have three psychological needs that should be addressed in order for the teacher to feel successful. The teachers must feel competent in their teaching skills, they must have a positive feeling of relatedness or acceptance with their colleagues, and they must enjoy a sense of autonomy in their work; if these areas are not addressed, teachers cannot be expected to thrive.

### **Reported Needs of Beginning Teachers**

Research is present that details the needs of beginning teachers from the perspective of beginning teachers. Clark and Byrnes (2012) reported that beginning and preservice teachers rate mentorship, common planning time, and the opportunity to watch other teachers teach as very important components of induction. In this same study, the participants did not highly rate reflection as an important component of the program; the authors suggested that this was an indication that these teachers are still in survival mode. Similarly, there are reports that

beginning teachers find value in being observed by, and having the opportunity to observe colleagues (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Beginning teachers appear to want practical advice and help from experienced colleagues in addition to nonthreatening and non-evaluative emotional support from colleagues. Likewise, beginning teachers report that this support should not force them into the mold of the teacher providing the support, but should enable them to find their own teaching style (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001). Brock and Grady (1998) reported that most beginning teachers feel they need a mentor to be successful, and feel it best if the mentor is experienced, teaches in the same content area, is able to provide suggestions about how to improve, can discuss experiences with the beginning teacher, and is available to just listen as needed. They also noted that beginning teachers want mentorship support throughout the year instead of just at the start of the year as is offered to many of the beginning teachers who participated in the study. Montecinos et al. (2011) suggested that preservice teachers valued learning teaching skills over any other learning. (Interestingly, only one third of professors in the study felt the same way.) The authors argued that education programs should enable preservice teachers an opportunity to assume a greater degree of responsibility for pupil learning; assuming more responsibility as preservice teachers will better prepare these teachers for their first years of teaching.

The literature shows that there are many factors that are important to consider when supporting teachers new to the profession. Beginning teacher fears, inadequate education for beginning teachers, and limited supports for beginning teachers are just a few of the factors affecting a beginning teacher's ability to progress as an educator. Further to this, the effects of school culture are also important to consider. The next section will explore culture in more detail.



## **The Effects of Culture**

Like most other established organizations, schools are often said to exhibit a certain culture. Because of the way in which schools are staffed, many schools have staffs that are relatively stable with minimal teacher turnover from year to year. In situations where there is an extended shared history between individuals, cultures develop. When new members enter the group they are subject to the cultural forces present in the organization. As such, examining the literature on culture is important in understanding how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement.

### **The Basics of Culture**

Any organization that has a shared history will at some point develop a set of shared assumptions. Basic shared assumptions must be learned by the group and be successful in enabling the group to solve external adaptation and internal integration problems. Once shared assumptions have served this purpose and worked well enough to be considered valid, they begin to become taken for granted by the members of the organization. When assumptions become taken for granted, the assumptions form the basis of the organization's culture, and are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel while part of the group or organization (Schein, 2004).

According to Schein (2004), culture can also be defined with the help of four dimensions. To begin, culture is structurally stable. The culture of a group defines the group; culture gives the group meaning, predictability, and can endure even if some members of the group leave. Because the group members value the stability they get from their culture, it is very difficult to change. Second, culture is deeply embedded within the group. Culture reaches to the level of unconscious thought within the members of a group, and for this reason is often difficult to see

evidence of directly. Because of the depth to which culture reaches within a group, it also has the added characteristic of increasing stability. Third, the breadth of culture in a group is far-reaching. Culture covers all aspects of how a group operates. Schein noted that the effects of culture on a group of individuals are pervasive. Fourth, culture implies that the rituals, customs, values, and behaviours of a group are integrated together to form an entire package. The underlying assumptions found within a culture are so basic that they permeate all aspects of the group and lead to largely consistent thoughts and actions (patterns) by the group members. Patterning creates a consistent and predictable view of how tasks should be performed and how difficulties should be addressed. Since disorder and randomness tend to make people anxious, the patterning found in culture is highly valued and will be protected by group members (Schein, 2004).

### **How Culture is Developed and Maintained**

Culture can form in one of two ways. A group can be created where the founders instill their values, beliefs, and assumptions into the group, then impose these views upon the group and go through the process of selecting members who share the espoused views. The other way culture can develop is spontaneously. In this situation, spontaneous interactions in an unstructured group will result in patterns being developed, which eventually develop into group norms. Once enough time has elapsed, the established group patterns become the basis for the group culture (Schein, 2004).

Regardless of the method that culture initially develops, once it has been formed, the patterns and behaviours will only remain the basis of the group culture if they are seen to be successful for the group. If the group is viewed to be successful following the group patterns, these behaviours and beliefs will gain strength and become shared among the members of the

group. In contrast, if the original patterns are deemed to be unsuccessful, the group will continue to search for patterns that will lead to group success. When a successful set of patterns is established, the group will become less and less conscious of them, and begin to treat the views, beliefs, and values upon which the patterns are based as nonnegotiable assumptions. Eventually, the group assumptions are no longer examined but become taken for granted absolutes. When absolutes are established, they define the identity of the group; the established assumptions are unconsciously followed, taught to newcomers, and produce anxiety and other uncomfortable feelings when violated by group members (Schein, 2004).

### **Behaviours as Manifestations**

Once a culture is established, it gets passed on to new group members as they gain entrance into the group. Largely this process involves teaching the new members the behaviours that are acceptable within the group. While the shared assumptions of the group determine much of the group behaviour, Schein (2004) noted that studying what is taught to new members might only give us a limited understanding of the group culture. Observing what is taught to new members is an effective way to discover some of the elements that comprise the culture of the group, but these elements can often be superficial reflections of the culture. The heart of the culture, the shared taken for granted assumptions, only get shared when new group members have gained access to the inner workings of the group where the secrets of the group are shared. New members to the group often have to experiment with behaviours to determine what is acceptable within the group. Through experimentation and the feedback received from established members as a result of the experimentation, new members gradually begin to understand the beliefs of the group, and eventually the shared assumptions. Schein warned though that behaviours would not always lead to an understanding of the culture of a group. For

example, sometimes all members of a group display similar behaviours because of environmental or biological factors, such as cowering in the presence of a physically imposing group leader. When unfamiliar with the shared assumptions of a group, it can be difficult to distinguish between behaviours driven by biological (or other) factors, and those attributable to shared assumptions. This distinction can only be drawn once an individual has access to the taken for granted assumptions underlying the culture of a group (Schein, 2004).

### **Implications for Teachers**

Practically, culture has an impact on the working conditions of all teachers. Angelle (2006) argued that professional socialization influences both career longevity and teacher quality. She determined that the leadership of the school creates the culture of the building and the tone of the teacher's first years of teaching. Ultimately the culture and climate of the school determine whether a beginning teacher's socialization process is positive or negative. Angelle further noted that even when a beginning teacher's social integration into a school is successful, often ensuring they will continue teaching, it does not guarantee good teaching practices. Alhija and Fresko (2010) found that the context of a school is the single biggest factor in determining whether beginning teachers are successful in socialization or not. Likewise, Christensen (2013) suggested that micropolitical processes are capable of having negative effects on beginning teachers' professional identities. Without being adequately addressed, novice teachers may experience detrimental effects due to the lack of prioritizing beginning teacher socialization.

### **Prior Beliefs**

Understanding preservice or beginning teachers' prior beliefs is important when determining how they will react to new ideas. There is a general acknowledgment that personal beliefs are important in shaping an individual's current behaviour. An individual's beliefs

influence her perceptions and understanding of events, thereby giving the individual a frame of reference from which her actions will originate (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). As an example, it has been shown that a preservice teacher's acceptance or dismissal of more sophisticated views of teaching can be predicted by the prior beliefs that the individual holds (Daniels & Shumow, 2002). Likewise, preservice teacher's beliefs orient them to consider or disregard information from their curricular experiences (Montecinos et al., 2011). More specifically, a teacher's initial beliefs might have a significant role in determining whether workshops are influential on a teacher's beliefs and actions. This may be reason to rethink the information gathered about participants when determining how to best offer professional development workshops to teachers. There are some limitations though. For example, when beginning teacher's beliefs change, this might not necessarily lead to a corresponding change in teaching practices. There appears to be other factors that need to be considered in order to understand this phenomenon. Similarly, changes in novice teachers' beliefs do not ensure that these teachers will continue to alter their beliefs as they progress through their professional careers; beginning teachers' belief changes might in fact be due to the context of the school (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008), an idea explored in the next section.

### **Colleagues' Effects on Beliefs**

While there is evidence that teachers' prior beliefs are influential in determining their behaviours, there is also evidence that the opinions of colleagues shape new teachers' beliefs as well. Christensen (2013) noted that established staff members pass on the culture codes of a school to novices. Culture codes determine what is culturally accepted, and what is not. During a one-year study following six intern teachers, Rozelle and Wilson (2012) found that cooperating teachers had a very strong influence on the beliefs of their intern teachers. The authors

determined that preservice teachers copy the style and mannerisms of their cooperating teachers, even if the cooperating teachers' style does not match the preservice teachers' beliefs. What is more, Rozelle and Wilson discovered that preservice teachers who are able to successfully copy the teaching style of their cooperating teacher actually alter their beliefs to match the cooperating teacher's teaching style. In contrast, those preservice teachers who do not successfully copy their cooperating teachers' style retain their original beliefs, but act in ways that do not match their original beliefs; furthermore these unsuccessful copiers' ideas on how to teach are disjointed and lack concreteness owing to the fact that they have not been thoroughly practiced. From this information, Rozelle and Wilson suggested that the manner in which beliefs are established likely begins with the opportunity to enact the beliefs in practice. They further argued that it therefore matters a great deal with whom the preservice teacher gets paired, for when the preservice teacher copies the beliefs of the cooperating teacher, these new values outweigh the preservice teacher's prior beliefs and any values espoused by the preservice training. This is similar to Ashton and Cairney (2001) who determined that teachers often echo the dominant culture of a school, which is a combination of the ideas and actions supported by the individuals within the building. Likewise, Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin (1993) reported that beginning teachers who are successful at being initiated into the culture of a building adopt ways of thinking and acting that resonate with the existing culture of the building; beginning teachers who disrupt the culture are rarely successful at becoming a member of the group. The authors further stated that the most common strategy used to fit in was to refrain from speaking and offering opinions. It is largely accepted as a wise micropolitical maneuver to remain silent in order to be viewed as fitting in with the dominant thinking of the organization.

## **Induction Programs**

Owing largely to increased recognition about the difficulties faced by many novice teachers as they embark on their careers, induction programs have been created as a form of support. Since induction programs are designed to assist beginning teachers' transitions into the profession, they represent an important consideration when taking into account how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement.

### **Benefits of Induction Programs**

The research previously cited (Angelle, 2006; Danielson, 2002; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008) seems to indicate that there are a number of difficulties that novice teachers can expect to encounter as they begin their careers. As a response to beginning teacher hardships, induction programs have been developed. For some, induction programs for new members represent an important item to which attention must be paid as it has the potential for dramatic positive change (Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993). When well executed, there is evidence that induction programs result in increased job satisfaction, teacher efficacy, and retention of new teachers. Furthermore, getting multiple induction components in an induction program has a strong and statistically significant effect on decreasing teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Retaining capable teachers is an essential consideration for school districts, especially given the current environment where improved student learning for all students has become paramount; having to recruit and train new teachers has been shown to have a negative impact on student achievement (Molner-Kelley, 2004). Induction programs are also critical because they allow for socialization processes to occur with beginning teachers. Alhija and Fresko (2010) demonstrated the importance of socialization and noted that successful socialization of beginning

teachers results in more competent teachers who have increased levels of commitment to being on the job.

Aside from the personal benefits enjoyed by beginning teachers, there are also increases to teachers' teaching capabilities during their involvement with effective induction programs. As an example, induction programs that include mentoring seem to enable beginning teachers to develop critical reflective skills. Reflection skills are important in promoting ongoing teacher growth and increasing job satisfaction, both of which are foundational for increasing teachers' skills (Danielson, 2002). Schaffer, Stringfield, and Wolfe (1992) found that structured induction programs can help beginning teachers learn management skills. This has the effect of helping teachers decrease the amount of time spent dealing with behaviour and organization issues, with the added benefit that more time is freed up to deal with instructional issues. More specifically, the authors reported in their study that over a two-year period where beginning teachers experienced a specific induction program, the teachers expanded their instructional strategies; this was contrary to the authors' expectations based upon previous research. Additionally, the teachers involved in the study exhibited an increase in student-centered thinking in the second year of the program, a very beneficial attribute not commonly reported in second year teachers. This research supports the findings of Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, and Pesenti (2009) who noted that within communities of practice, beginning teachers at times demonstrate the ability to focus on student learning and exhibit teacher characteristics more commonly associated with autonomous teachers. These teacher-learning gains were attributed to active involvement in a professional learning community where multiple mentorship opportunities presented themselves. These findings are similar to the suggestion that when teacher preparation is focused on content-specific pedagogy and supported with similar induction methods, beginning teachers are more



likely to acquire the teaching behaviours and dispositions that will benefit them in standards-based teaching (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008).

### **Poor Induction Programs**

The literature on teacher induction argues the benefit of these programs, but is also ripe with examples of teacher induction program deficiencies. While many new teachers now experience some sort of induction activities upon arrival in the profession, most are very superficial and questionable in value (Molner-Kelley, 2004). As well, mentors, a commonly used induction program component, are often unprepared and simply plucked from the teaching ranks with little thought as to the numerous competencies mentorship demands in order to be effective (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Aside from this, the way new teachers are prepared to teach does not match the existing culture in most schools where the new teachers find themselves. When there is a mismatch between preservice education and existing school culture, immersion of beginning teachers into a school, without some structures to support alternate beginning teachers' beliefs, leads to replication of the status quo and ends reform-minded thinking (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012).

### **Unsupportive Context**

In addition to cultures that are unaccommodating of beginning teachers' teaching methods, there is also evidence that induction programs will be ineffective in unsupportive contexts. Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) noted that collaborative and isolationist cultures can have major effects on induction program results. The authors found that individualistic cultures limit the effects of induction programs, while collaborative cultures help to extend induction program influences. It seems that no matter what elements are included in an induction program, the program will not likely be powerful enough to overcome problems with the context of the

school (Huling-Austin, 1986). Similarly, Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2008) noted that school context has a large influence on induction programs in general, and mentoring specifically. Factors such as poor leadership, isolating cultures, and staff who are demoralized create situations where effective induction and mentoring are very difficult to achieve; these factors are evidence that induction programs will always be limited by the influence of the school context in which the mentor works. In reference to communities of practice, Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, and Pesenti (2009) noted the importance of having a context where professional learning communities are supported; if supporting structures are not part of the culture of the school, beginning teachers will likely revert to the typical inconsistent and ineffective programs of the past.

### **Important Induction Components**

The literature notes recommendations for overcoming the barriers to teacher induction and creating effective induction programs, resulting in benefits for beginning teachers. It has been suggested that teacher induction programs need to bridge the difficult transition from student to teacher. One way to bridge from student to teacher is exemplified by offering assistance to new teachers. Offering assistance is an important step as it signals to beginning teachers that they are not alone and implies a culture of collaboration, which helps novice teachers to further their development (Alhija & Fresko, 2010). There is also evidence that teachers grow professionally when they choose to use professional supports available to them, such as the opportunity to interact with other peers for dialogue, feedback, affirmation, and support (Danielson, 2002). Another suggestion involves implementing programs where teachers have the opportunity to be learner-focused as opposed to curricular-focused; this will help beginning teachers learn the complexities of the job and better prepares them for what awaits when they

begin their careers (Montecinos et al., 2011). It is also beneficial for beginning teachers to have their basic needs of security, affiliation, and self-esteem met; this means that they must feel they have the support of administrators and colleagues before higher-level skill development is a possibility (Angelle, 2006).

### **Using Mentors**

The suggestion to use mentors as induction components is common. There appears to be a need to have induction policy focus as much on mentors as new teachers, since supporting the kind of teaching needed to implement present day accountability reforms is complex and involved work. It has been recommended that if states provided monies to support these efforts there would likely be more fidelity to the state educational goals (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). In a study involving full-release and site-based mentors, Fletcher and Strong (2009) determined that full time mentors have a greater impact on student learning than site-based mentors; all full time mentors spent the entirety of the time working as mentors, while the site-based mentors in the study had teaching responsibilities in addition to their mentoring activities. Meanwhile, it seems important to have induction programs with mentors who do a good job of not only teaching technical skills and providing emotional support, but also helping beginning teachers to understand the importance of increasing student achievement (Molner-Kelley, 2004).

There is additional research dealing with the effectiveness of mentors and the value of collegial relationships. Research suggests that the strongest factors affecting teacher success are having a mentor in the same field, having common planning time with teachers in the same subject area, having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and being part of an external network of teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Supporting these ideas, Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) noted that subject-specific induction programs are very important for

beginning teachers if they are expected to reach curriculum standard levels. The authors further stated that collaborative relationships with beginning teachers could help them learn to teach, even in contexts where the overall culture is unsupportive for the novice teachers. There is also evidence that using multiple mentors within a professional learning community has benefits. First, the mentorship can be initiated while the beginning teacher is in the preservice phase and mentorship can be continued into the first years of teaching, thereby extending the mentorship into the internship stage. Second, preservice teachers will have access to a number of mentors, which will increase the opportunity that these teachers will receive the help they need when required. Third, a mixture of strong ties (collaboration with like-minded individuals) and weak ties (analysis of ideas with opposite-minded individuals) can easily be established. Strong ties are beneficial for providing support, while weak ties are beneficial for challenging thinking; it would appear to be appropriate and advantageous to have a mixture of both (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009). Alhija and Fresko (2010) noted that the benefits from successful socialization are most strongly attributable to the mentors with whom beginning teachers worked, and are in no way associated with workshops the beginning teachers attended. The authors argued that the critical role a mentor will play should be considered when determining possible mentors. Evidence suggests that mentors are important for breaking down isolation within successful learning communities, with a result being that teachers who get mentored show increases in socialization, teaching skills, and support when facing dilemmas. It was further argued that reflective thinking is crucial for teaching as it teaches educators to suspend judgment and consider multiple sources of information, and that reflective thinking is best learned in a social context such as mentoring. This ability to critically reflect is important for developing teacher efficacy and fostering ongoing growth; when an individual's strengths and weaknesses

are identified, information is available to guide the work needed to improve the individual's teaching (Danielson, 2002).

While it is documented that beginning teachers find social and professional benefit from mentors, there is also research regarding what mentors need to be successful. There are numerous authors calling for the proper training of mentors. Alhija and Fresko (2010) noted that mentors needed to be trained in all aspects of the job (including how to socialize beginning teachers). Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) felt that there are benefits to training mentors to help beginning teachers reach their capacity to teach. The authors stated that training mentors is crucial as beginning teachers who work with trained mentors are able to better organize and manage classroom instruction, and establish better classroom routines. What is more, the students of mentored beginning teachers exhibited better behaviour and engagement when compared to students whose teachers did not have trained mentors working with them. Similarly, Huling-Austin (1992) found that mentors require training in order to be effective, and that it is best if mentors teach the same subject areas and grade levels as their mentees. As well, mentors noted that having a chance to network with other mentors was important. In the study conducted by Molner-Kelley (2004), mentors met biweekly as a mentoring professional learning community in order to give members the opportunity to discuss, reflect on, and improve their mentoring abilities.

There are warnings in the literature of the need to avoid the belief that any classroom teacher has the ability to be a successful mentor. There should be recognition that mentoring is a professional practice that is a learned activity, and not something easily acquired simply by virtue of being a classroom teacher (Brock & Grady, 1998; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). There has been a call for schools to establish criteria for the selection of mentors, to define the

role of mentors, and provide the appropriate training to ensure the process is successful (Brock and Grady, 1998). Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) stated that in order for mentors to accomplish their tasks, they need opportunities to work with beginning teachers in authentic situations, which would require easy access to beginning teachers at regular times to do the mentoring work. It is also important to note the work of Rozelle and Wilson (2012) who reported the large influence cooperating teachers have on the beliefs of their intern teachers. They found that the beliefs of experienced teachers have a significant impact on the beliefs, and resulting actions or inactions, of novice teachers. This is an important variable to consider when determining mentor selection.

### **Making Teachers Aware of the Realities**

As noted previously, beginning teachers seem unaware of the difficulties that await them as they begin their careers. There are calls in the literature for this to be addressed through teacher induction programs. Huling-Austin (1992) noted that those individuals designing induction programs should keep in mind that beginning teachers often feel that teaching will be easy and that they will be very successful, when the reality will likely be very different. In one study it was found that preservice teachers felt very confident in their ability to communicate effectively with parents, while in reality, the beginning teachers' confidence was far superior to their actual skills (Walker & Dotger, 2012). The authors suggested that this might occur because novice teachers have limited opportunities to practice their teaching skills and therefore are unaware that they have any deficiencies. That being said, the primary goal of having an induction program cannot be simply to make teachers feel better about themselves, without at least equally attempting to develop and improve beginning teacher performance (Huling-Austin, 1986). Rosenholtz (1989) stated enlightening beginning teachers to their weaknesses could be

beneficial; when teaching becomes viewed as inherently difficult, it also becomes accepted that beginners will seek professional assistance. Rosenholtz suggested that assistance is exactly what most beginning teachers require. Finally, Daniels and Shumow (2002) found that beginning teachers believe that all students learn in similar ways to the beginning teachers' preferred learning style; this inaccurate view of reality should be addressed with beginning teachers.

### **Education in Micropolitics**

There is research stating the need to have beginning teachers educated in micropolitics, defined here as how beginning teachers should interact socially and professionally with other teachers. Christensen (2013) noted the importance of teacher staffrooms, and stated that staffrooms are where teachers learn informally, unintentionally, and in unplanned ways. Cultural information is passed through staff channels, and therefore informal interactions between teachers must be managed, with particular attention paid to the staffroom. As well it becomes important to note that because beginning teachers are often confronting the dissonance between their view of themselves as teachers and the reality of what it means to be responsible for a group of pupils, novice teachers are often experiencing tensions, doubts, and revisions to their own beliefs. Beginning teachers, therefore, are highly susceptible to the influences of their colleagues, which is why it is important that micropolitics be explicitly taught as part of teacher education. By teaching professional socialization and micropolitical realities, beginning teachers will be better equipped to navigate the realities of staff interactions and relationships (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights a number of issues to consider when examining how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement.

Beginning teachers often enter into schools where the benefits of parent engagement are known, but where there is a failure to implement strategies that result in authentic parent engagement. The failure to implement has many reasons including: schools holding the balance of power in parent-school relationships; schools setting the agenda for parent-teacher interactions; lack of support for teachers to implement parent engagement strategies; teacher beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions; and parent characteristics, beliefs, and worldviews. Recommendations to remedy the lack of parent engagement in schools include: increase supports for teachers to enable them to attend to parent engagement, make teachers aware that parent engagement can occur off the school landscape, increase teacher efficacy, make teachers aware of the subtle aspects of parent engagement, and introduce more parent engagement education at the preservice stage of teacher education. As well, the research presented in this chapter suggests that parent engagement can be increased when teachers engage in outreach gestures toward families, when teachers redefine professionalism as emergent, and when the focus for parent-teacher interactions is on quality interactions as opposed to the quantity of interactions.

Research detailing the difficult reality of being a beginning teacher is also presented in this chapter. Novice teachers have a difficult task that can be overwhelming, which causes some of them to leave the teaching profession. The reasons presented in this chapter for the challenges that beginning teachers face include: insufficient preparation at the preservice and induction stages of learning to teach; limited supports for beginning teachers; and beginning teachers' fear of being judged an inadequate teacher, resulting in beginning teachers avoiding collaboration with experienced colleagues. Recommendations to address the issue of difficult beginnings for novice teachers include: an alternate set of expectations for beginning teachers, the opportunity



for beginning teachers to teach multiple classes instead of having a wide variety of courses to teach, and ensure that beginning teachers' psychological needs are being met.

The effect of culture is also presented in this chapter. The importance of how culture is formed, how culture shapes behaviours, and what implications this has for teachers are discussed. The research on culture seems to indicate that the culture of schools has an impact on the beliefs and assumptions of teachers. Similarly, research involving the effect that teachers' prior beliefs and colleagues' beliefs have on beginning teachers' behaviours is presented. It appears that mentors and other individuals who work with beginning teachers must understand that the mentor's beliefs will have an effect on beginning teachers' beliefs.

Finally, research regarding teacher induction programs is presented in this chapter. It appears that increased teacher retention and improved teacher capabilities are benefits that can result from teacher induction programs. There are difficulties involving induction programs though; most notably that many induction programs are superficial at best, and many school cultures are not supportive of induction programs and therefore limit the effects of the programs. To address the limited effectiveness of induction programs, the research literature suggests emphasizing collaboration between teachers, using mentors to help beginning teachers, training mentors before assigning them to their mentoring activities, making beginning teachers aware of the difficult realities of the teaching profession, and educating beginning teachers in micropolitics.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences influenced a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement. A qualitative research approach involving a case study was employed to explore the research questions for this study. This chapter describes the rationale for the research design, the method that was employed, and ethical considerations.

#### **Methodology and Rationale**

A number of authors (Coe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Waring, 2012) have proposed that good researchers understand their own philosophical assumptions and paradigms, and make these explicitly known to the reader of a study. Coe (2012) stated that the philosophical position of the researcher is important as it determines the kind of research undertaken, the questions asked, and the methods to be employed. As such, an analysis of the philosophical assumptions upon which this research is based is in order. The research was conducted under a constructivist philosophical assumption. Constructivism is a theory of how people come to acquire understandings. Constructivist learning theory posits that individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge through experiences and the associated reflections on those experiences. In this assumption, reality is not seen to be either objective or singular; instead multiple realities are seen to exist which are constructed by individuals (Waring, 2012). Further to this, the research is situated in the epistemological position of interpretivism. Researchers advocating this position believe that gathering knowledge directly is not possible, and therefore knowledge must be created through interpretation of observations and accounts provided by individuals (Creswell, 2007; Waring, 2012). As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted, meaning for

individuals is always negotiated; individuals interpret with the help of others. The research paradigm favoured by the researcher is one of social constructivism. The social constructivist paradigm espouses that individuals seek to understand the world they live and work in by creating subjective, varied, and multiple meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Because the meanings are varied, researchers look to study entire complex issues as opposed to narrowing meaning into a limited number of categories. Social constructivism leads researchers to rely heavily on the views of participants as the researcher interprets the views of others; in this worldview meaning is negotiated both socially and historically. Both the participants' and researcher's views are formed through interactions with other individuals. In practice, the researcher asks broad and general questions that lead to discussion where the research participants can construct meaning. Furthermore, since researchers using a social constructivism paradigm understand their own backgrounds shape their viewpoints, the researchers acknowledge that their experiences influence their interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) suggested using a qualitative research methodology when an issue needs to be explored, especially when that issue requires a complex and detailed understanding. Since determining how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement required a complex understanding of, at minimum, school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences, a qualitative research methodology was in order. A qualitative research methodology was also appropriate since it is naturalistic, meaning research can occur in natural settings as opposed to contrived environments, and it enables researchers to investigate issues in all their complexity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Qualitative research is a natural fit for a researcher holding a social constructivist worldview since qualitative research

problems revolve around individuals and groups creating meaning from social or human issues (Creswell, 2007).

A case study methodology was employed for this research study. A case study involves studying an issue through a minimum of one case within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007) and is used to increase understanding of complex social phenomena (Yin, 2003). Creswell (2007) further defined a case study as a study that occurs over time, through extensive, in-depth data collection involving varied and multiple sources of information. For the purposes of this research, a single exploratory instrumental case study was performed (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Creswell noted that an instrumental case study is used to provide general understanding of a phenomenon. A case study can be accomplished by selecting an issue, then selecting one bounded case study in order to explore the issue. This was an effective methodology for this research project since a clearly identifiable bounded case existed where an in-depth understanding of the case was desired (Creswell, 2007).

### **Method**

The methodology used for this study followed an instrumental case study approach, as outlined above. Data were collected from one beginning teacher through direct observations, from the beginning teacher and the school principal and vice principal through semi-structured interviews, from other teachers (experienced or inexperienced) through culture walks, and through document scans.

### **Defining the Case**

The case studied in this research project was a beginning teacher who was commencing her first year of teaching, teaching secondary classes in the province of Saskatchewan.

## **Participants**

The participants are purposefully selected for a typical case (Ashley, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). For this study, the teacher participant was selected from beginning teachers who were entering their first year of teaching; teachers entering their first teaching position who had experience as a substitute teacher were considered for inclusion in the research project, as one assumption of the researcher was that substitute teachers would have very limited interactions with parents while performing their substitute duties. The beginning teacher who was ultimately selected had experience as a preservice teacher but had never taught under a professional teaching contract until she was awarded the position with which she began the 2013-14 school year. The principal of the school, the vice principal of the school and a teacher who had taught at the school for a number of years where the beginning teacher was employed also participated in the research project.

## **Data Collection**

Creswell (2007) stated that the goal of qualitative research is to learn about the issue from the perspective of the participants. Therefore, research was conducted in a manner that attempted to capture the perspectives of the research participants. The primary focus of the research was to understand how school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences influenced a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement. To understand the perspectives of the research participants and gain knowledge about the context where the beginning teacher was employed for the year, a number of different data sources were accessed. The data sources included semi-structured interviews, culture walks, document scans, and direct observations.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Creswell (2007) noted that when researching under the social constructivist paradigm, researchers ask questions that are broad and general, enabling participants to construct their own meaning. Creswell believed that the “more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting” (p. 21). As such, semi-structured interviews were used with the beginning teacher, the school principal, and the school vice principal. The semi-structured interviews invited the research participants to address the research questions and elaborate where applicable. The interview questions addressed issues involving teacher beliefs and experiences, school culture, induction supports, and the beginning teacher’s beliefs about parent engagement. As well, during the beginning teacher interview, the participant was asked to reflect on her parent-teacher interview experiences both as a preservice teacher and as a high school student with her own parents.

**Culture Walks.** Two teachers and the researcher performed culture walks to further understand the context of the school where the beginning teacher was employed. These culture walks occurred during a parent-teacher interview evening, and during a school day. During the culture walks, participants recorded their observations during a trip around the school and described the meaning they attributed to what was viewed and heard.

**Document Scans.** Document scans of the school handbook, new staff orientation packages, school policies and procedures, and division policies and procedures were performed to determine the level of teacher induction supports available to the beginning teacher. During document scans, the researcher looked for evidence or exclusion of mentoring supports, time supports, different expectations for beginning teachers compared to experienced teachers, and other factors that the researcher deemed relevant. Other data such as emails and correspondence

with parents was discussed with the beginning teacher during the semi-structured interview process.

**Direct Observations.** Direct observations of the beginning teacher occurred during a parent-teacher interview evening.

### **Data Analysis**

All data collected were coded for analysis. Saldaña (2013) noted that the value of coding data is that they can then be grouped into categories, which allows for the development of themes, and ultimately assertions. As well, Saldaña suggested writing analytic memos while research is progressing. Analytic memos are works authored by the researcher that reflect on the coding process, coding choices, and other considerations such as patterns, categories, and concepts that emerge during research (Saldaña, 2013). These memos are similar to journal entries; they are a place to capture the researcher's thinking. Analytic memos were used in this research project.

Using Saldaña's (2013) generic coding process, data analysis for this study took place as follows: First cycle coding methods were used to organize the data for further analysis, while second cycle coding methods were used to further refine the data and find themes. Saldaña's suggestions for using the following first cycle coding methods were incorporated:

**Attribute coding.** Attribute coding is used as a way to label basic descriptive information about each datum (Saldaña, 2013). Attribute coding was used on all data collected, to track and organize. This included information such as the date, location, how the information was accessed, and the speaker (as needed).

**Structural coding.** Structural coding is used to divide collected data into specific categories (Saldaña, 2013). This type of coding was used to divide the data into specific

categories that aligned with the research questions of this project and was used for all data collected. Structural coding enabled the data to be placed into the following four categories that align with the research questions: “Experiences of the Beginning Teacher,” “Beginning Teacher’s Prior Beliefs,” “School Culture,” and “Induction Programs.”

**Descriptive coding.** Descriptive coding is used to detail the basic topic of a passage and is essential for second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding was used to code field notes and documents. This process yielded general categories that were useful in shaping the themes of the research.

**Values coding.** Values coding is used to code data for values, beliefs, and attitudes (Saldaña, 2013). Values coding was used to code interview transcripts. Because of the importance of understanding the values, beliefs, and attitudes of participants in order to interpret the shared assumptions of the culture in which the participants find themselves (Schein, 2004), values coding is an appropriate and important tool to employ.

**Pattern coding.** Following first cycle coding, second cycle coding was performed. For this task, pattern coding was used. Pattern coding is a process of grouping coded data into larger, more meaningful themes (Saldaña, 2013). Pattern coding was used for all data collected so that meaningful themes became evident. These themes formed the basis on which the implications of the research were developed.

### **Trustworthiness of the Research**

Qualitative research is primarily focused on investigating complex topics in context, while quantitative research is concerned with operationalized variables. Because of this distinction, the standards used to gauge acceptable quantitative research are not applicable when evaluating qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Terms such as reliability and



generalizability, which are very important in quantitative research, are not used in the qualitative realm. Instead, what follows, are the factors that define trustworthy research in this qualitative study.

**Credibility.** Research can be considered credible when a researcher has spent vast amounts of time in the field gathering data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007). The time spent gathering information ensures that saturation of data has occurred and helps to diminish researcher bias. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted that most biases are superficial and do not hold up to the mass of evidence that is typically gathered after spending a sufficient amount of time doing fieldwork. The research conducted included site visits on three separate occasions; three separate interviews with the beginning teacher, each lasting approximately an hour; an interview with the principal that was over an hour in duration; as well as an interview with the vice principal after she had completed a culture walk. As well, follow up conversations occurred with an experienced teacher following his culture walk. In addition, documents from both the school and school division were analyzed.

**Triangulation.** Another way to ensure credibility is to include multiple data sources from the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Varied data sources, including observations, interviews, and documents increase the credibility of a research project (Creswell, 2007). For this research project, all three data sources were accessed.

**Transferability.** There is general agreement among authors that qualitative research is not particularly well suited for generalizability (Ashley, 2012; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Mears, 2012; Yin, 2003). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted that qualitative researchers are not concerned with absolute generalizability, but look to determine under what conditions and with what subjects their findings are generalizable. Yin (2003) drew a further distinction and

argued that case studies have been seen to be poorly suited for generalizability, while in reality they are poorly suited for statistical generalizability. Instead, case studies can be used for analytical generalizability, which Yin defined as generalizing results to a broader theory, instead of the general population. With this distinction noted, this research study followed Creswell's (2007) advice and strove for transferability. In order to achieve transferability, thick description is employed. With thick description, researchers attempt to recreate a situation with as much detail as possible, as well as describe the meanings and intentions that are also present in the event (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). When thick description is used, enough detail is present to allow the reader to determine what aspects, if any, of the report are transferrable to different situations and events (Creswell, 2007). Even though the results may not be absolutely generalizable to new situations, they may offer a range of possibilities for similar circumstances (Mears, 2012).

**Dependability and Confirmability.** In order for a research study to be considered confirmed and dependable, it must be able to withstand an audit by the reader (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2003) suggested operationalizing as many components of the research as possible, and documenting what was done during the research project so that readers can determine how data were collected and results were obtained. For this research project, protocols were developed for interviewing, observing, and gathering data, and select data are included as appendices to ensure confirmability.

**Validation.** Ascertaining the degree to which research participants give reliable information and are representative of their time and place is the goal of validation in qualitative research (Mears, 2012). Creswell (2007) stated that the attempt to assess the accuracy of a study's findings could be determined in a number of ways. Creswell felt that prolonged

exposure to the field and persistent observations give qualitative research its validity. Likewise, getting information from multiple sources, clarifying researcher biases and assumptions, and using thick description are also useful in proving the validity of a research study. Finally, Ashley (2012), Creswell, and Yin (2003) each advocated for the use of member checking to ensure that the perceptions of the research participants and the interpretations of the researcher are accurately represented. Member checking was undertaken in this research project; all participants had the opportunity to read the preliminary analysis and edit as necessary to ensure their contributions were accurately represented.

### **Piloting the Research Protocol**

Prior to commencing the interviews with research participants, practice interviews were conducted with volunteer teachers using the developed semi-structured interview questions and research protocol. This ensured that the interview questions were easily comprehensible and addressed the purpose of the research. It also provided the opportunity for follow up questions to be developed. Likewise, the protocol for participating in a culture walk was tested with teacher volunteers to check for ease of comprehension and implementation by the research participants. Adjustments were made to address the issues that were noted.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research protocol established by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board was followed for this research project. Permission to undertake the study was requested and granted from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the school division, the school, and the specific participants involved in the study. Clear explanations of the research purpose were provided to all participants. Names of research participants were not used, so as to protect the identity of all individuals involved in the research

project. Likewise, the identity of the school where the research occurred was changed and reported in such a fashion that the location cannot be easily identified. Transcribed interviews and culture walk data were provided to participants for their approval before being used for data analysis.

**Data Storage.** All digital files, including audio files and transcriptions, were located on my personal computer. Back ups were done on a USB drive and an external hard drive. All hardcopy information is locked in a filing cabinet at the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Education under the direction of Dr. Michelle Prytula and shall be destroyed following the expiration of the study in five years time.

### **Summary**

This chapter defined the philosophical assumptions and worldview of the researcher and made a case for utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. A bounded case and participants were defined. The method for collecting, analyzing, and ensuring data trustworthiness was discussed, along with ethical considerations for the research project.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA**

#### **Introduction**

The research contained hereafter was collected during the 2013-2014 school year. Three separate interviews were conducted with the beginning teacher (BT); one interview at the beginning of October 2013, one interview before the first set of parent teacher interviews at the beginning of November 2013, and one at the end of June 2014. During the school year the principal (P) of the school was interviewed, as was the vice principal (VP). The vice principal also completed a culture walk. As well, information was gathered from an experienced teacher (ET) at the school through a culture walk and interview. Documents from the division Beginning Teachers' Workshop were made available, as was the school handbook for School X. The researcher also made observations during visits to the school in October, November, and May.

#### **Context**

School X, where the BT taught for the 2013-2014 school year is located in a community with a population of over 500 people. The school draws students from the town proper, as well as the surrounding farms and acreages. The community is located within a 100 km radius of an urban center with a population exceeding 200,000 people. According to the school's VP, School X had a K-12 student population of over 300 students for the 2013-2014 school year. The school is a publicly funded institution, which follows the provincial curriculum and employs provincially licensed teachers. Class sizes range from low 20 to low 30s for core classes, with many elective courses having fewer students.

The BT grew up in a home with two working parents, one who worked in K-8 education as a teacher. Prior to being hired for the position at School X, the BT completed a bachelor's degree in Education from the local university; she had spent the previous fall doing her internship at a school in the same school division as School X. During her internship, the BT taught solely Home Economics to students from grades eight through 10. Beginning her career, the BT was initially hired fulltime for the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year. Eventually she received a halftime contract for semester two and she was able to sub at School X for many of the days she was not employed with her halftime contract duties. During the school year the BT taught Home Economics to students from grades seven to 12, taught Art Education to students in grades eight and 12, and taught modified Science and Social Studies to students from grades nine through 12. The modified courses ranged in grade level and were taught by the BT in the same room at the same time to a number of different students; the BT was effectively teaching in a split grade classroom while instructing modified courses.

### **Challenges of a Beginning Teacher**

As noted previously, beginning teachers face many challenges as they enter the profession including being given the same teaching loads as more experienced teachers (Angelle, 2006) and being asked to teach the most difficult students (Danielson, 2002), all while being offered very few resources (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001). Not surprisingly, the BT in this study experienced many challenges as she began her career. Most notably she expressed issues with becoming familiar with the individuals with whom she was expected to interact and the procedures to which she was expected to adhere, overcoming her initial lack of confidence, and balancing the demands of the job with the time she had available to her to meet the demands.

## **Becoming Familiar**

A challenge experienced by the BT during her first year of teaching was becoming familiar with the individuals who populated the school community, both on and off the school landscape, and learning the protocols, policies, and expectations that existed within her school. The BT noted that it was a challenge to connect with all the new people whom she met during the school's Meet the Teacher night. She reported that because of how many activities were occurring that evening, it was close to overwhelming and that she did not get to say everything she had envisioned to the parents in attendance.

We did a Meet the Teacher night. And they came in here to dish up their plates – we had a BBQ. So I got to meet them all, those who showed up, coming through here, which was good. I got to meet them and I got to chat with them a little bit, though not as much as I would have liked to. But even for me, everyone is a new face. So it was, I wouldn't say overwhelming, but there was just a lot going on that night and I didn't get a chance to say everything that I wanted to to a lot of people. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The Meet the Teacher night experience was similar to the BT's internship experience. During her internship, the BT noted that she felt overwhelmed with trying to make significant connections with parents (BT, October 2, 2013).

The BT reported that learning how the school operated took some time. She recounted that there were times when she needed help in determining what was the appropriate course of action. Some of her queries were easily addressed, as was the case when she sought direction from a colleague about how to deal with a student who would be missing class for a holiday (BT, November 4, 2013). Likewise, when the BT had questions about how to book a bus for field trips or required a coaching meeting with her administrators, she reported that her questions were

quickly answered and her requirements quickly met (BT, October 2, 2013). On the other hand, some expectations that were communicated to the BT caused more stress. The BT's anxieties mainly involved expectations from the division about preferred instructional practices, which differed from those that the BT had gained familiarity with during her time preparing at university and during her pre-service work. Specifically, once the school year had already begun the BT found it difficult to adjust her understanding of sound teaching practices. Since the BT spent a large amount of time in the preceding summer preparing her courses for the fall, the BT noted it would have made her first few weeks of teaching much less stressful to know the instructional expectations in advance of the planning she had already completed up to that point.

So at those first days [of division PD] – we talked about the Targets for Engaged Learning, and kind of went through that. Last day we talked about Big Ideas and Essential Questions and how we create those for our classes. And then we had lots of time to sort of map out a unit or something. Which I found helpful, but – this is kind of sad maybe, but I feel I've been let down somewhere along the way, because I'm just thinking about Big Ideas and Essential Questions now. You know...And I'm thankful for [the direction], but I planned all summer for all these things, did I ever write down Big Ideas for each unit? No. And now I feel like I'm just trying to stay above water and how am I going to have time to go back and do that for everything? ...Why didn't I know that earlier? (BT, October 2, 2013)

A final challenge for the BT that she reported as a result of being new to the profession was the need for direction on how to communicate with parents. The BT felt that it could be challenging to determine the appropriate amount of information to send home to parents about what was occurring in class. Her main fear was that parents would be overloaded with information and would find it intrusive, or that parents would not be as interested in the course as



the BT and would therefore find the communication annoying. The BT did report though that parents should be made aware of upcoming exams.

I feel like maybe [the parents] get a lot [of information] and [I wonder] do they value this class as much as I value it? I don't want to be – maybe intrusive is the word, or annoying maybe? Like do you care that we made this today? And here's the recipe if you want to try it with your kids. I don't know if I should go to that level. But I obviously when a test is coming up or a practical exam or something like that [I should tell them]...but there's a probably a line in there too that I'll find one day. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The idea of trying to find the appropriate level of disclosure during communication with parents so that the parents would value the communication was also evident when the BT considered what interviews should look like with the parents of her Home Economics and Art students.

When compared to the amount of information she would want to share with the parents of her Resource Room students, a group with whom she felt it was important to communicate, the BT seemed to feel that it might not be as productive to take up the parents' time for a meeting regarding her Home Economics and Art classes. She felt little of value would be shared at this type of meeting. The BT worried that the only information she would have to share with the parents of her high achieving students was what activities were occurring in class (BT, November 4, 2013).

### **Overcoming Lack of Confidence**

The BT reported instances where she found herself in uncomfortable situations owing to a personal lack of confidence in her abilities and decisions. The lack of confidence felt by the BT manifested itself as the BT exhibiting avoidance behaviours, most notably when parents had the possibility of being present. As an example, the BT and another new teacher were charged

with coaching the senior girls volleyball team at their school. At the beginning of the season, these two beginning teachers decided against holding a meeting for the parents of the players.

When asked why they decided on this course of action, the BT responded:

I don't know. All of a sudden we're two weeks in, you know? It's not too late, never too late [even now]. We still have like four or five tournaments, but I really don't know why. Maybe we never brought it up because we both felt intimidated by it? ...Like I've been caught a few times in here with a volleyball parent and my co-coach just happened to walk by and I'm like so thankful that she stops in because it's nice to have another voice – someone who's supporting your thoughts. (BT, October 2, 2013)

Another situation occurred where a parent confronted the BT and her co-coach during a volleyball game. The situation escalated to include an unpleasant exchange of words and ultimately lead to the coaches avoiding the parent following the incident. The BT reported that the altercation with the parent was very uncomfortable and left her and her co-coach shocked and feeling like they did not yet have the experience to deal with such a situation. As a result of the incident between the parent and the BT, the parent's one child quit the team and the BT reported that she had not spoken with the parent since because she found the parent frightening.

[The parent] is just going on and on and on. And so she's saying she's going to take her girls home and take the balls with her – it was just this crazy conversation...It was just such a shock. So we didn't know whether we should laugh or cry, or what to do, because no one ever tells you [how to deal with] that. So we just said, “You've got to do what's best for you.” And then she just walked away eventually after a few minutes of screaming...Anyway, her daughter has now quit the team, and it's been this terrible thing. But we haven't had a chance to have a conversation with her since. Like she kind of –

well it's probably us too. We avoid her because she's frightening. But we dealt with it – like I'm sure we could have dealt with it better by actually saying, "Hey this isn't the time to talk about it, but we can talk to you after the game." You know? “We were too new to know,” we kept saying. (BT, November 4, 2013)

Avoidance of talking to parents is something that the vice principal of the school also identified as commonly occurring with beginning teachers. The vice principal noted that when a student is not being successful it is the responsibility of both the teacher and the parent to communicate and find out what can be done. Specifically regarding the role of the teacher, the vice principal commented that, while it is common for beginning teachers to avoid contacting parents, if a teacher has not contacted parents to let them know their child is struggling the teacher is at fault (VP, November 5, 2013).

The lack of experience the BT identified as being a component of why the conversation with the upset parent did not go well was also evident in other situations. When the need to contact parents arose during the course of her teaching duties, the BT felt that she still needed to build skills. She felt awkward being younger in age than the parents with whom she was communicating and further noted that she wanted to improve her skills and to be able to project confidence during her conversations with parents. This was a skill the BT felt that she could develop over time and would help her to have more productive conversations with parents.

I'm having trouble being younger and having to talk to these moms – I don't know, maybe that's bad in itself, but I want to – I just want to be able to have better skills or a skill set to be confident in my choices I guess. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The BT further reported that if she were asked to teach subjects outside of her area of expertise this situation would cause some discomfort when it came time to contact parents (BT, June 24, 2014).

When thinking of the following year, the BT noted some apprehension around an anticipated situation where she felt that parents would want to question her about her decisions regarding the composition of the senior girls volleyball team. Based on skill level, there seemed to be the possibility that younger girls would earn the majority of playing time over their older counterparts. The BT was worried that the parents of the older players would be upset and the BT felt some trepidation because she did not yet feel she had the experience to confidently engage these parents in constructive conversation.

The younger girls are going to be stronger than [the older girls]. I want [the parents] to know, like if we're going to play competitive, the younger girls would be the ones on the court. Then how do you deal with parents when their daughters are a year older or two years older and are not playing as much as they younger girls? Because we have a big enough number, I think we can do a younger more competitive team, and an older, hopefully there-to-have-fun-and-play-some-volleyball team. I'm nervous about having to do it on my own...I'm already nervous about what the parents are going to say about what team their daughter is going to be on. So that makes me a little nervous about having that conversation. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT further noted that dealing with criticism from parents could be bothersome to her. When questioned about interactions with parents, the BT reported that some volleyball parents had commented to her and her co-coach that their demeanors were too positive and perhaps a change

would be in order. The BT seemed to take offence to the idea that some parents did not appreciate the demeanor with which she conducted herself as she coached the team.

We've been cornered and told that we're too positive, because the girls aren't used to this positivity. And so that's been really hard for us to take in, because, first of all you're criticizing what we're doing, which if it was constructive and it was actually helping us, for sure. But just to say, you guys are way too positive out there? It was really hard... Don't you want a positive experience for your kid? There hasn't been good feedback from parents in the way that we have decided to be positive. (BT, October 2, 2013)

### **Managing Time**

Another theme that emerged from the data regarding the challenges of a beginning teacher was noted a number of times by the administrators of the school. The principal reported that some beginning teachers struggle because the job necessitates that beginning teachers devote a lot of their time to developing their craft; she felt that many beginning teachers did not adequately account for this time requirement. As a result, the principal felt that beginning teachers did not make allowances to afford themselves the time to contact parents, nor did they give themselves an adequate amount of time to be properly planned for their classes.

It's our new teachers that – and I don't want to paint them all with the same brush so to speak, because some of them are amazing – but we find that sometimes the majority of them are so busy with their own personal lives that the idea of [contacting parents] is not there... I think [beginning teachers] struggle the most with planning. They struggle with – it's not about not knowing how to plan, it's about not giving themselves enough time to plan... You need to be thinking about your day somehow, somehow, there's a couple hours of planning you need to put into place to make it through the next teaching day. So

when you start seeing your job as quarter to 9:00 to 3:15, or until 3:30, you're not well planned. (P, May 21, 2014)

The vice principal of the school echoed these thoughts, and noted that planning makes up a huge component of whether or not a beginning teacher will be successful (VP, November 5, 2013).

Similarly, when asked what the biggest challenges are for beginning teachers, the school's vice principal reported that beginning teachers become exhausted and busy because they do not have enough time during the school day to meet all the requirements of their job.

I think they're just exhausted and busy, because we don't have a lot of prep time. The good teachers stay late or take stuff home. But you have a tendency to burn out. You have to have a little bit of a life. But you need to put some time in to your planning. I think that's the biggest challenge. (VP, November 5, 2013)

### **Parent Involvement and Engagement**

When looking at the situations described by the research participants it seems apparent that there are instances where parents were placed in a position where they fulfilled the agenda of the school, while there appear to be other instances that could be more readily classified as parent engagement activities and initiatives.

#### **Parents Fulfilling School's Agenda**

During the research period at School X there were found to be many examples of parents acting in accordance with the roles established for them by the school. This included parents acting as volunteers, and audience members. When discussing coaching the grade 10 through 12 girls' volleyball team, the BT noted that parents acted mainly as chauffeurs for their daughters so that the players could attend practices and games, as cooks and servers in the concession at the

home tournament, as spectators during competitions, and occasionally as chaperones when the team travelled to different sites to compete in tournaments.

For the most part [the parents] just were the transportation, because none of the grade 10s have licenses. A couple of them stayed over with us at an overnight tournament. It was lovely. Two of them stayed. Otherwise it was just drivers usually. And then, just for tournaments, preparing meals and getting things ready. (BT, November 4, 2013)

Similarly, the vice principal reported that parents were often seen on the school landscape acting as audience members for school events. Specifically, the vice principal noted that parent turnout for school events such as Meet the Teacher night, Christmas concert, Remembrance Day service, Grade 12 Graduation, and Parent-Teacher Interviews was always very high. She further reported that this high attendance rate for parents led her to believe that the parents supported the school and its events (VP, November 5, 2013).

Regarding interviews, the BT commented that during her internship most parents seemed to come only to be told information from the teacher. According to the BT, there seemed to be little appetite on the part of the parents to ask their own questions.

Those were all interviews where it was like, we had a lot of praise about their kid, then it was over. At least that I can remember. There were no concerns – either way. There were no parent concerns, like they sat there; they wanted to hear all the good things about their kids then it was over. There were never any hard conversations that I can remember. Or hard questions. (BT, November 4, 2013)

The BT noted that this was very similar to how her own parents viewed their role when it came to parent-teacher interviews. She recounted:

I don't think anyone ever asked them, "How does your daughter learn best?" or "What's the best way I could teach her?" you know? But I don't know if I had any issues that kept me from learning certain things. I don't remember a lot, but, I'm sure they were never asked about that sort of thing...So they participated in the ways that they were given the opportunity to, but they didn't push to do other things. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The VP noted that parents are asked to help with staffing a welcome and refreshment table during parent-teacher interviews. The specific parents who filled this role were members of the school's School Community Council (SCC) (VP, November 5, 2013). Along with acting as a welcoming committee during parent-teacher interviews, the vice principal recounted that SCC members also help to enlist parent volunteers for other school activities. The VP indicated that the SCC was indispensable in recruiting parents to help out the school, and that any volunteer areas that could not be satisfactorily filled by the SCC members solicitation could be attributed to the fact that many families now have two working parents whose professional commitments kept them from volunteering (VP, November 5, 2013). The principal noted that there were not many expectations of parents on the school landscape, but that there definitely were expectations of parents off the school landscape.

I think parents have a role initially to become informed about what the education program is in the school. I don't know that it necessarily needs to go as far as to research curriculum and completely be familiar with all curriculum. For us it's helpful if parents can focus on reading...In those early years, there's a read every evening program for example. Reading, writing, those types of things. [We hope] that they ask questions, that they come to parent-teacher interviews...They should know what's going on in the classroom. Not on a day-to-day basis, but that they have a general idea. I don't think that



we, the school, should have the expectation that parents be here volunteering. The majority of our parents both work. So they can't be here to be part of the reading program. So I think that as a school we have to try to figure out how to involve them as two working parents at home. (P, May 21, 2014)

The principal further stated that as children get older their parents often feel they can be less involved with the school and monitoring their child. The principal felt that parents have a responsibility to be aware of how their child is doing in school regardless of the age of their child. She noticed that as the child progressed through the school system the school's expectations of parents evolved as well, beginning with tasks such as helping to drill spelling words and continuing on to include activities such as checking their child's grades and attendance online as the child aged (P, May 21, 2014).

The vice principal also felt that there were certain expectations of parents that were appropriate for members of the school to have. Mainly, the VP felt that, while parents should not be responsible for teaching their child the curriculum, parents should be responsible for providing the structures at home necessary to ensure their child was well behaved. She suggested that parents should ensure their children receive proper nutrition, have a reasonable bedtime, perhaps have some reading time at home, check to see that homework is completed on time, and stress to the child the importance of listening to the teachers.

I don't think it's the parents' job to teach [their child]. They might not have the skill set themselves. And that's not their job. Their job is to hopefully, raise appropriate well-behaved students. But I think it's teacher's job to do all the teaching...As long as there's structure at home where there's good parenting going on. Doesn't mean they're teaching the course or the curriculum, as long as there's good parenting. Getting to bed on time.

Maybe doing a little bit of reading on your own time. Maybe homework isn't important in your house, but knowing that it's got to be done for tomorrow. Asking, "Are you working in class? Are you listening to the teachers?" (VP, November 5, 2013)

The principal also gave some insight into how the school perceives parents' roles when she spoke of appropriate parent voice. She used the analogy of the healthcare system to suggest limitations on the input of parents into the education of their child.

If somebody from the healthcare system asked me to come in and give information, I could talk in generalities about expecting good care, about expecting a clean hospital. I don't think it's up to me to make decisions about staffing, it's not up to me to make decisions about which floors need to be open in a hospital or not. There are people who have expertise in that area. And so I guess I have the same feeling about education. We spend a lot of time and effort and money in educating people who acquire that expertise. [Parents] need to have a voice. The voice needs to be there. But we need to recognize that there's a point at which [the parents'] voice ends and we have to leave certain things up to the people who are trained. Not to say parents don't know what they're doing, but they're not trained. (P, May 21, 2014)

The principal detailed how, in her view, parent engagement can be achieved by different means in different environments. She felt that in some communities, parent engagement might mean that you hope that the parents will engage their children at home with the school's reading program, while in other communities parent engagement might mean one hopes that the parents provide their children with proper nutrition and other necessities of life (P, May 21, 2014).

Finally, the principal did note the importance of giving information to parents so that they would have the details they needed to support the educational program of the school. She felt that if

parents have information about what is happening at school they will be drawn in as partners, though there would still need to be limits on what questions parents should reasonably be asking.

I personally love the fact that assignments and information is emailed [to parents]. I think that's fantastic. I think that's the way to draw parents in as partners. And I think that's the definition of that active partnership we want to have. Here's the ELA assignment. Here's the question sheet that goes with it. It's due on this day. And as a partner in the school process, [a parent] can say, "How about that ELA assignment"? And to me, that's the key part about partnering. Not, "I want to comment on your assignment and I didn't think it was this, I didn't think it was that. I thought you should have asked more questions in this section of the story." I don't know that that's necessarily a parent's role. If it's an inappropriate assignment, certainly, they should have the opportunity and the right to comment on it. (P, May 21, 2014)

### **Parents Providing Input**

Though the research, participants presented instances where parents were expected to fulfill the roles designed for them by the school, there were also examples of times when parents provided meaningful input into the educational plan of their child. In one such instance, the BT worked with a parent to change the course content to be more inclusive and better meet the needs of a student on a gluten-free diet; this situation developed to the point where the BT incorporated recipes sent to her from the parents of the student with the gluten-free nutrition requirement.

It turns out he's on a gluten free diet, but there was never that communication to let us know of it. There were some issues. Do we modify every lab to be able to suit this student's needs? It sacrifices the others in his group, because now they have to be working with gluten-free products. In that sense, the parents were really good about it.

[They said,] “Well if every other lab was something that he could consume in the end, then that is good.” And they were sending us recipes to work with, which was helpful.

(BT, October 2, 2013)

Likewise, while working with a student with some disabilities, the BT communicated regularly with the mother of the student. At the beginning of the year, the mother resisted the programming offered to her from the school, but through communication between the BT and the parent, they came to have a productive relationship (BT, October 2, 2013). In another situation during the first set of interviews that occurred at the school, the BT noted that a parent meeting was especially useful. When asked how the interview went, the BT replied that it was very beneficial because during the interview the BT learned a great deal more about the student than she could have ever learned by simply observing the student on her own.

[The parent] had a lot more to offer, to tell me about the girl than I would have ever picked up on. And she was so open about her background, to the point of what builds her up, what cuts her down...It was huge in understanding how this girl actually works. It would have been good to have that conversation at the beginning of the year. Though I guess it was only a couple of months in. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT had a similar positive interaction with a parent that led to the BT being proud of the transference of work done by the student from school to his home setting. Because of ongoing conversations that had taken place throughout the year between the BT and the student’s parent, the BT evolved a better understanding of the student’s abilities than she would have gathered on her own.

So that communication, for me, I was so happy because, he's actually doing something at home. Without that, I didn't know if he really could do things on his own. So [the parent]

giving me that feedback, based on what he'd been doing at home was good. You can connect the growth. You see that he was comfortable doing it here and that it translated. We encouraged him to keep trying it at home, and he actually did it. And I wouldn't have known that otherwise. (BT, June 24, 2014)

On the flip side, communication between the BT and another parent enabled the parent to gain a much better understanding of what her son was capable of from the BT's reports. The BT received a note at the end of the year from this parent thanking her for the ongoing communication and explained to the BT that because of the communication the parent had increased her expectations for her son and was impressed with the resulting growth she had seen (BT, June 24, 2014).

The exchange of information and ideas between the BT and parents was not unique to the BT. Feedback received from an experienced teacher (ET) at School X indicated a similar experience regarding homework. The ET found through communication with parents that parents were finding the amount of homework assigned by the ET to be difficult to manage. The ET related how parents felt that they did not have enough time in the evenings to get their kids to extracurricular activities and devote an adequate amount of time to school work. Based on this parent feedback, the ET adjusted the amount of homework assigned.

Not all situations where parents provided input were positive. The BT had an experience with a parent providing input to the BT that was decidedly difficult. As noted previously, in her role as coach of the girls' volleyball team, the BT found herself in a heated confrontation with a parent upset at a decision the BT had made. This interaction may help explain why the BT reported feelings of apprehension and uncertainty when thinking of dealing with volleyball parents for the next season. The BT noted feeling apprehension about having to make decisions

about which girls would play on the competitive team and which girls would end up on the developmental team. She further worried about having to communicate her decisions to parents, especially parents of the older players who would likely be placed on the less competitive team (BT, June 24, 2014).

Interestingly, aside from the negative interaction with the upset volleyball parent, the BT noted that even though she had been involved in many conversations with parents throughout the volleyball season, she did not know of any volleyball parents that wanted more input into decisions or wanted to discuss the values of the program (BT, November 4, 2013).

Though the BT had some negative experiences with parents, she did make some statements that were favorable towards including parents in decision-making. During an interview towards the beginning of the school year, the BT noted that she believed there was a place for parents in making decisions affecting the courses in which their child was enrolled. She felt that parents could be valuable to act as an advocate for their child, should their child be too shy to voice feelings of boredom or feelings of frustration. She also noted that parents are well situated to be able to explain what needs their child might have and what interests might drive them. For this reason the BT expressed an openness to the idea of having parents give input into the classes the BT taught, while also noting that there would need to be a limit to the amount of parent input; the BT was not sure what the limit would look like.

If students are looking for more of a challenge, or maybe things are too much sometimes, but the students are not willing to voice things in class, I feel like [parents] should be communicating [with me about that]. I know what I have to teach, but there are also different avenues that you can take to get there. So if there's something that that parent knows that works good, or maybe they have challenges in certain areas, but they suggest

going about it this way. Like I'll take any of that that I can get. And I think it's important to voice that as a parent...But I don't, I guess, about the content that we actually do go over, I don't know what the parents' role would be. (BT, November 4, 2013)

Similarly, in a meeting held shortly before the first round of interviews, the BT noted that she wanted the event to be a useful and positive time for both herself and parents. She envisioned interviews as a time when she could get more information about the child and where parents could find answers to the questions that they had or express thoughts they felt were important (BT, November 4, 2013). By the end of the year, the BT still held on to the belief that parents should have a meaningful role in their child's education that is not solely based on the role specified by the school. She continued to express an openness to having parents have input into the classes she taught and reported a sustained interest in creating partnerships, as defined by the BT, with parents, while at the same time noting that she remained unsure what this situation might look like when enacted.

Ideally parents should be involved in what [students] are learning. If [parents] value certain things then those should be the things we're teaching their kids. In my setting it's a little bit easier than others, in my opinion. I can add certain things into Home Ec. that you can't necessarily in math. It should be more of a partnership with parents. And I don't know how that looks in the senior level. But it should be. Having open communication about what they're doing at home and how it's reflected at school, and what they're doing at school and how it's reflected at home. (BT, June 24, 2014)

Similar to the beliefs of the BT, the principal noted that there is a time, and even a necessity, for parents to initiate conversation with the school, especially in situations where a student may be struggling (P, May 21, 2014).

One final theme about providing meaningful input to parents was noted by the BT. On a couple of occasions the BT reported that creating a relationship with parents was not as easy as she believed it would be, based upon what she was exposed to during her undergraduate education program. She reported that she did not think it was currently realistic, for logistical reasons, to have meaningful relationships with all the parents of the roughly 150 students she taught (BT, June 24, 2014). The BT also felt that creating relationships with the parents of high school students was difficult to do, though she noted that most of her attempts involved using email to start conversations.

And I mean I don't know if emailing is enough. I'm not saying that parent engagement is just sending out email. But I think after that course [at University], thinking of what it should be compared to how it is, we're not anywhere close to being correct. We're not having coffee with our grade 10 parents on a Tuesday evening. And the reality is people don't have time for that. You have lives. That's just the way it is. Like I thought that if I called 10 parents I could have a conversation with eight of them, that kind of thing.

Whereas, that's never happened for the most part. You send out 30 emails and 1 reply, or 2. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT further testified that getting replies back from parents had been difficult and she was tempted to conclude that this meant they were uninterested in what was happening at school. The BT wondered if this could be attributed to the fact that they were the parents of high school students, as this cohort of parents no longer seemed eager to know what their child did at school. She hoped that parents would want to know what was going on with their child at school, which would lead to communication back and forth between her and parents.



[The parents] are just not as eager to be involved in, even in the simple things. Like about knowing what's going on day to day. If I don't get any feedback how do I know if [the parents] are actually interested in it? So the dream would be that parents check my website or check the email and are looking every week to see what's happening or looking at the end of the week to see what their child did do. And there's communication back and forth to see what they are taking home I guess. (BT, June 24, 2014)

### **The Beginning Teacher's Beliefs About Parents**

Before she began work as a professional teacher, the BT held some beliefs about the role of parents in the education of their children. Important themes from the research include the origin of the BT's beliefs about parents, the BT's beliefs about parent input into the education of their child, and the BT's beliefs about communication with parents.

#### **Origin of the Beginning Teacher's Beliefs about Parents**

During her undergraduate work, the BT reported that she took a class about community engagement, a class that set the foundation for many of her beliefs about parents and raised her awareness about the importance of involving parents in education. She attributed her belief that parents needed to be authentically involved in the education of their children to the learning she took away from the university class on community engagement.

If I didn't get it from that one class from university - honestly if I never took it, which it's not a required course, I wouldn't have even thought about it at the senior level. Because, I mean I guess they do their visits in Kindergarten – their home visits – and just through knowing what my mom does at school and how engaged she is with the parents and being in a small community helps too. But I never would have connected it here without that university class. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The BT noted that no other class during her undergraduate work focused on the role of parents in the education of their child (BT, June 24, 2014).

The other source that the BT credited with shaping her understanding of parents' roles in education owed to her own parents and her upbringing. She noted the influence of her upbringing at the beginning of the year during the first interview in the research process.

Well, my parents always cared what I was doing, for sure. Mom being a teacher, maybe that helped too. Like there wasn't a day that I came home that I didn't go through my day, or have to take out all my homework, you know, that kind of thing. Mom was really involved in helping with extracurricular stuff. Not that dad wasn't; he just worked later, you know – that's how it works. But they were always concerned – not concerned, but always involved in what I was doing in class. But I didn't have too many problems in school. But they would go to all the parent-teacher interviews and that sort of thing. (BT, October 2, 2013)

By the end of the BT's first year of teaching, the BT noted that her beliefs about parents, which had remained largely consistent from the beginning of the year to the end, could still be attributed to two major sources. The BT reiterated that she felt that much of what she learned about the role of parents came from her enrollment in the Community Engagement course during her undergraduate coursework. She reported that through the coursework in this class she had taken advantage of the opportunity to spend time at inner city and community schools. She noted that these opportunities made her appreciate the importance of family and community in the lives of her students.

I took a class in university that was on community engagement. We got to spend a lot of time at inner city school and community schools. Those kids come with so much every

day that you can't even fathom. Being able to be a part of their little community for a while and see how some parents are there dropping their kids off every day, and some are never there. I had to go every morning with one teacher and we'd hand out alarm clocks. Knock on doors, hand out alarm clocks...So through that class I kind of saw the value in parents and community. (BT, June 24, 2014)

Again, by the end of the year, the BT still noted that the way she was raised by her parents had a part in her understanding of parents' roles in education. When asked if parent engagement would have been a consideration for her, or if it would have been important without the university class, she replied that it would have been because she came from a family where she was cared for and where the importance of school was made clear to her on a daily basis. She stated that, "I always had someone who cared about what I was doing in school and who asked me every day about what I was doing" (BT, June 24, 2014).

By her own admission, the BT believed that her first year of teaching did not change her beliefs about the role of parents in education, but instead gave her a deeper understanding of the realities of what it means to try to create relationships with parents, and the role that parents occupy in the school system where she found herself teaching.

I just have a better knowledge of how parents actually are in the schools. Like we have this big dream and we have reality. And now I've got to live it. So that would be the difference I guess. (BT, June 24, 2014)

### **BT's Beliefs about Communication with Parents**

When the school year began, the BT had some beliefs about the way that communication should occur with parents. Specifically when discussing coaching volleyball, the BT felt that it was important to have a two-way communication channel with parents so that misconceptions

could be easily clarified, and so that information about how the players were feeling could be communicated efficiently to the coaches.

I just think it's so important [to communicate with parents] because all these girls go home with different ideas right? As coaches, we should know how your daughters feeling about being on the team. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The BT also weighed the practicality of home visits with parents versus the need to get to know parents and gather information from them. Knowing that some students would benefit from having a home visit occur, the BT questioned whether or not home visits were a practical undertaking for her considering the vast number of students in her classes. Even though she was unsure of the practicality, the BT felt that connecting with parents was very important and affirmed it was a goal of hers. She felt that parents were able to tell a teacher where a student comes from.

We talked about home visits in the [university] class, and at this level is a home visit really necessary? Or is it practical? I guess would be the better word to use. But I think that [parents] can bring a lot, like knowing why one student works better in this situation. I think that knowing where a kid comes from and what they're bringing is important, and so a parent is obviously able to provide that information. And not that I'm [connecting with parents], or using it to its fullest potential right now, but that's a goal of mine to be able to, at the beginning of the year talk with every parent and see what's going on. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The BT began her teaching career hoping that parents would want to be active in their child's education, yet was unsure of how much information to send parents. The BT worried that sending parents too many communiqués could be viewed as intrusive or annoying.

I would hope if [parents] were interested, they would ask too, you know? [Parents] have a huge role in their child's education too. It's not just the teacher. I guess if they wanted something they would come and ask me, but that's probably not the case. But [sending] weekly updates would probably be fine, I would imagine. I don't need to attach a billion things to it. I don't think I do anyways. Maybe I do? (BT, October 2, 2013)

When speaking about the types of communication occurring between the BT and parents, the BT noted that after her initial emails to parents giving them the outline for her courses, she followed that up with information to parents about upcoming assignments or assessments. Approximately two months into the school year, the BT noted that sending emails to parents was not creating many relationships between her and the parents. She reported that the only response she was receiving to her emails was letting her know when a student would be absent (BT, November 4, 2013). Even though parents were not replying to the BT's emails, the BT felt that at least a portion of the parents of her students were well informed about the progress of their child. She believed this because she felt parents would be aware of their child's absences and because of the work the BT had done to keep her online marks program up to date (BT, November 4, 2013).

Also at the beginning of the year the BT reported that she wanted the initial parent-teacher interview between herself and parents to be a welcoming experience in the hopes it would lead to further communication. The BT hoped that the communication between the parents and her would be mutually valuable; parents would be expected to communicate but would know that the BT would use parent input to benefit their child.

I want it to be such a welcoming place. So I guess I would expect them to want to be involved in that sort of thing. Attend parent-teacher interview nights. Send – I guess I'm not doing my job there either, but like, giving updates on how things are going at home,

and maybe how they're using what they've learned at home. We do a couple of little assignments where the parents give me some feedback on how [their child] did. I think that should be okay to expect of parents. And then I guess in turn, parents should be able to expect that we are utilizing the information that they are sending back. That I'm not just, okay, there you got 5 out of 5 for bringing it back. That I can actually see, oh they're still struggling in this – with measuring or something, you know? ...Then I'll be able to know where to go from there. (BT, October 2, 2013)

In a discussion just prior to the first set of parent-teacher interviews the BT expressed a number of beliefs about the upcoming interviews. The BT's first response about interviews indicated she believed that there likely needed to be an issue to be resolved in order for the meeting to have a purpose (BT, October 2, 2013). She felt that parents would feel that their time had been wasted if they showed up to an interview and the BT did not have some concerns to share. Specifically regarding attendance, the BT felt that students who were not in class necessitated at the very least a phone call and perhaps a full interview as well to address the issues. The BT spoke about the desire to have the interviews be positive and stress-free, enabling parents to get any information they desired, and enabling the BT to get info about her students (BT, November 4, 2013). After this the BT expressed her desire for equity between parents and her, unlike the interviews she remembered participating in as a high school student. In those interviews there did not seem to be a sense of equality between teacher and parent; the BT felt that it was mainly the teacher who did all the talking and determined the agenda of the meeting.

Though I know, like it should probably be an equal thing. Like I would like to hear as much as I could from them. But just from my – like remembering interviews that I've

been at with parents during my internship, it was all just like the parent and the student sat there and you talked and talked and talked and said, “If you get this done you'll have this mark.” (BT, November 4, 2013)

Even though the BT wanted to have relationship-building meetings with parents, she did express some uneasiness when trying to justify having parents come in to meet with her during the scheduled school-wide interview times.

My parents went to all those interviews, but I think that a lot of parents just go when there are problems, right? And so I would hope I would just have something to justify, or just to show them why these problems are happening, or how we can go about fixing them. (BT, November 4, 2013)

By the time the BT had finished her first year of teacher, her understanding of communication with parents had evolved. The BT reported that many times she used email as the communication method to contact parents. The purpose of these emails was often to either provide information to parents, or to alert parents to issues with their child, such as attendance concerns or missing assignments. When asked how often the BT was sending home emails, she reported that it was often every week or every other week that she emailed all her parents updates. She further stated that she likely emailed at least one parent every single day, most times to alert them of issues that were imminent or needed to be addressed. The BT noted that getting a response from parents to the emails she had sent was not a very productive endeavor and the lack of response left her wondering if parents knew their child was not being successful. The BT also expressed disappointment in the lack of parent response and how it had not lead to the creation of relationships with parents for which the BT had hoped. The BT came to believe that the parents of the high school students she taught did not respond to emails because they had

been trained to not respond by that point, and that they probably believed that their children were old enough to take care of themselves without interventions from parents. The BT also suggested that perhaps parents were not replying because the BT may have been the only one in the high school who was looking for feedback from parents.

Like some, especially at the grade 12 level, some of the kids are checked out halfway through the year. Or the whole year even. They're just not interested. They have where they want to go and that's all that they can think about. I don't know. Maybe I'm the only one who wants that feedback from [parents]. And I can't expect them to always have the time to do the same thing back. (BT, June 24, 2014)

During the final research interview with the BT she did note that in her emails she always left an opening for parents to respond if they wished, but she never specifically asked for parents to reply to her emails. She suggested that not having an explicit invitation to reply might have been a reason why parents replied infrequently. When asked if she felt it was the parents' role to respond to emails if it was requested of them, the BT replied that she definitely thought that it was acceptable to expect parents to reply if asked. The BT also came to believe that authentic report card comments were an important part of communicating with parents because she assumed these comments were widely read and valued by parents.

I want parents to know how the students are acting in class too. Yes they might not be good at factoring, but they're working really hard and they come in with a positive attitude. Like that's important. To know their daughter or son isn't just coming in and sitting there and doing nothing. So I will continue to write the other stuff, because I think it's important...I like writing the comments because I know it's something that parents are for sure going to read. Well, 95% sure. (BT, June 24, 2014)



The BT indicated that most of the conversations that occurred with parents were because of issues that needed to be addressed; it was not common to see parents in the high school end of the school just to have a positive conversation.

I know parents come in for...conversations but I think it's always, "Your child is failing, and here's what they've been doing. Here's what I've been trying to help them. Here's what they haven't been doing."... You don't see parents in [the high school] end just for conversations about positive things very often. And I would be guilty of it too, because I don't do it often enough. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The ET also reported that it was a common understanding in the school that parents must be notified when there was an issue. The ET reported the school's administrators encouraged general communication with parents, but that it was an expectation that parents be emailed whenever an issue arose. As well, the ET felt that face-to-face interviews provided the opportunity for the teacher to be proactive with the parents in communicating any possible issues (ET, June 11, 2014).

At the end of the year, the BT came to hold some different beliefs about parent-teacher interviews, while other beliefs stayed consistent. The BT believed that high school parents did not seem to be interested in attending interviews, but did express hope that if parents experienced positive interviews with their child at the middle years level, perhaps they would then want to come when their child was in high school.

If we get them – like this girl in grade 8 – if all parents could be coming to interviews and having those conversations, or even just coming to Meet the Community night, or whatever you want to call it, if the ones younger started and build it up, maybe by the

time they're in grade 12 their parents would be interested. It would shift. (BT, June 24, 2014)

A view that remained with the BT throughout the year was that she wanted parents to come to interviews in order to make connections with them. Finally, a new learning reported by the BT by the end of the year was that parents would use interviews to signal to their child the value that the parent placed on education. During an interview with a specific parent, the BT came to understand that the main reason the parent had come to parent interviews was to reinforce to her daughter how important she thought education was (BT, June 24, 2014).

### **BT's Beliefs about Parent Input**

During a conversation at the beginning of the year the BT stated that she was aware that parents needed to be involved in the education of their children, but had not yet initiated her plans to make a connection with parents (BT, October 2, 2014). Later on in the year, the BT affirmed that getting information from parents about their child would be beneficial, yet parents were not often seen on the school landscape at the high school level. Knowing this, the BT indicated that she believed that parents would be more active in their child's education at school if they were offered more opportunities (BT, June 24, 2014).

The BT also shared some of her beliefs at the beginning of the year related to how decisions could be made with parents about the educational program of their child. The BT believed that parents definitely have a role in their child's education, but was unsure of where the boundaries would lie between her own authority to make decisions and the parents' authority.

I can plan lessons around what feedback I get from parents based on what they're doing at home, what they're saying at home. But I think that sometimes it could go too far too, to where maybe they're expecting too much almost. I mean we still follow a curriculum and

there are still guidelines you know? I hope that there was just an open line of communication between parent and teacher. But that it was never crossed, I guess. And where that line would be crossed, I don't know yet. I haven't, you know, I don't have any of that kind of experience I guess. (BT, October 2, 2013)

The BT continued and further expanded on what the role of parents might entail, but again stopped short of having definite answers. The BT felt that parents should be involved in what their children are learning, that parents should be free to act as advocates for their children, and that parents should be able to give information that influences the direction of the class. As for the actual content to be taught in class, the BT felt this was her area to decide and was unsure what a parent's role might be regarding this area (BT, October 2, 2013).

Similar to what the BT noted at the beginning of the year about the role of parents, the BT reported at the end of the year that parents have an important role in their child's education. Because parents know their children better than anyone, the BT believed that their input into why their children might be acting the way they were acting would be beneficial to her as a teacher. She also reported a desire to have a partnership with parents, where she would communicate with parents and then try to incorporate the values of the family into her courses.

I think that [parents] know their kids better than anyone else. So having their input into – even just like, why they might be acting out at times. Or why they might be tired on Tuesday mornings, that kind of thing. That's important for us to know as teachers, because we need to know what we can expect from them when we can expect it almost. Ideally parents should be involved in what they're learning. If they value certain things then those should be the things we're teaching their kids. It should be more of a partnership. And I don't know how that looks in the senior level. But it should be. Having

open communication about what they're doing at home and how it's reflected at school and what they're doing at school and how it's reflected at home. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT's desire to form relationships with parents remained unchanged throughout the school year. By the end of the year the BT reported she still had a strong desire to meet parents and determine where they come from and what they value (BT, June 24, 2014).

Even though the BT had a stated desire to have relationships with parents, she did feel that it is difficult to do this because of logistics. She also sensed that if parents were not already currently engaged with the school, the promotional activities sponsored by the school would do little to change this situation. She cited the example of a movie night held at the school and noted that these types of events would not likely do much to change some parents' attitudes.

[The school] does have movie nights and things, but if a parent isn't interested in that, or isn't really interested or engaged in their child's learning then they're probably not going to come to those things. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT also felt that the attitudes of parents shaped the attitudes and dispositions of their children regarding the value of education, for better or worse. The BT felt that it was difficult to motivate students whose parents did not value the courses she taught. She indicated that she held this belief because when she tried to communicate with the parents of a few students who had repeatedly skipped her classes, the parents either did not express much concern with the absences of their child or simply did not respond (BT, June 24, 2014).

Likewise, by the end of the school year the BT was still unsure to what level she should be involving parents in the education of their child. She seemed to find difficulty in creating reciprocal communication with parents and therefore did not feel she had created an effective mechanism to hear parent voice. An example of this lack of communication with parents was

apparent during a conversation about class work she had assigned that included an at-home component. The BT stated that the assignment asked parents to share their experiences as a teenager with their child, but only half of the students had returned their work; this situation left the BT wondering whether the work was not returned because the students had not completed it or because the parents were unwilling to participate.

We did an interview assignment and I was like, oh gosh I wonder how many of these parents are actually going to want to sit down and have a conversation about what their life was like when they were a teenager? And I still only have half of them back. So I don't know if it's because the parents didn't want to do it or if the kids didn't? (BT, June 24, 2014)

Even though the BT struggled to determine whether her requests of parents were appropriate, she reiterated her beliefs that parents needed to have voice in the education of their child and reaffirmed her belief that she envisioned creating authentic partnerships with the parents of the students she taught. Furthermore, the BT wanted to enable parents to create part of the agenda for conversations and stated a desire to create a partnership with parents. The BT reported that she would be very happy if parents came in with their own mandate and questions for her about the courses she taught (BT, June 24, 2014).

One other finding of note reported by the BT was her assumption that parents of high achieving students have parents who are good at parenting and value education.

Some of the grade 12s right now are working hard and are still trying to get that 90 something average, you know? They obviously have had a strong enough upbringing and education has been a focus for them and their families. Yet I haven't made connections

with some of those parents either, even though they have a strong [value of education].  
(BT, June 24, 2014)

### **Communication**

Aside from the beliefs and assumptions espoused by the BT, the data supported two other themes concerning communication between teachers and parents. It seems there are two characteristics of parent-teacher communication that lead to the formation of relationships, namely face-to-face conversations and inviting parents' input. On the other end of the continuum, the BT had some experiences with one-way communication that are noteworthy and influenced the way the BT experienced her first year of teaching.

#### **Communication to Build Relationships between Teachers and Parents**

The BT reported times when communication between parents lead to either the development of a relationship between her and specific parents, or the strengthening of an already existing relationship. Two characteristics seemed to change communication between teacher and parent from superficial or one-way interactions, to interactions that developed into relationships. The first was face-to-face interactions between teacher and parent. During her role as volleyball coach, the BT's team hosted a tournament. At the home tournament the BT reported that she was much more likely to speak with the parents with whom she had already met, as opposed to the parents she was meeting for the first time.

At our home tournament, I made sure to introduce myself to all the parents who did make an effort to come watch, and yet I found myself standing and talking a lot more to the parents who had been around in the first three weeks of volleyball. (BT, October 2, 2013)

When face-to-face interactions increased, the BT noticed that this form of communication increased the likelihood of a follow up conversation occurring, though the BT suggested that

most times the BT would still have to initiate a future conversation with the parent (BT, October 2, 2013). Furthermore, the BT felt that face-to-face conversations gave the opportunity to gather background information on students and to receive feedback from parents about what was occurring at home. In addition, the BT reported that conversations with parents regarding volleyball encouraged them to express their appreciation for the work she had performed, which in turn made her feel satisfied with her efforts.

The parents were really appreciative of the fact that their grade 10 daughter was able to play on the last tournament still. And so they just voiced that sort of thing. Which was good. And then a lot of grade 12 parents whose daughter sat all grade 10 and 11 were saying the same thing. So that's enough for us, you know? (BT, November 4, 2013)

The BT noted that the positive feedback that resulted from face-to-face conversations with parents was evident at the end of the year as well (BT, June 24, 2014). The BT also reported that parents were quick to seek her out to provide moral support following her altercation with a disgruntled parent. In one situation, through a conversation with a parent the BT found that one of her colleagues saw interviews solely as a time to address issues. The BT reacted to this by stating that she felt interviews could be a time to create a relationship with a parent. Finally, the BT noted that proximity to parents led her to have more face-to-face conversations with parents, and caused her to assert that she needed to do more in the future to connect with parents who she did not see frequently. Unfortunately, the BT noted that the prevalence of parents on the school landscape was not as great in high school as compared to elementary grades.

You can never have a meeting with a parent every week. They're not popping in like they are in elementary school. That's just the way it is. But if they had that option maybe they'd take advantage. I'd hope. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The other characteristic of interactions between the BT and parents that led to the creation and maintenance of relationships was inviting parents to have input. In one instance during her internship explored above, the BT noted that she struggled with programming for a student that had a gluten free diet until she and her cooperating teacher worked with the parents to find a solution. By asking the parent to give recipes that could be used in class, the BT suggested that a positive relationship was formed with the parents that would not have otherwise existed. The BT expressed another positive about requesting parents' input when she discussed an experience with a parent of a child with special needs. As a result of this situation, the BT again felt that her efforts were valuable and that the result of the work would lead to positive outcomes for the student in subsequent school years. The parent sent a note to school expressing her gratitude for the work the BT had done and gave an update on how the student was progressing at home. When asked if she felt this communication was important, the BT replied that it was very valuable for her because she felt sure the student had experienced some very positive growth during the school year as a result of her efforts.

I now know that he is capable...He can look after himself...I was so concerned at the beginning of the year. Like I didn't even know if kids would want to be in the cooking lab with him, because he's always got his fingers in his nose, you know? So being that I was so nervous about how to get him working with other kids, and using the tools, sharing that information was good for me. (BT, June 24, 2014)

The BT reported that communication enables parents to have input into their child's education, which provided the BT with more information about the students whom she teaches.

Furthermore, it enables parents to have a shared understanding of what occurs in the class.



I wouldn't know half the things I know about a lot of [students] if I didn't have that opportunity [to communicate with parents]. Even just being on the same page I guess, and them knowing your expectations in the class, as opposed to them being totally different. (BT, June 24, 2014)

### **BT's Experiences with One-Way Communication**

As noted previously, the BT reported that the majority of her communication with parents was in the form of emails. At the end of the school year the BT mentioned that she had a high comfort level with emails because it enabled her to control the message, much more than she would have with a phone call. The ability to craft her message before sending it to parents was one of the few benefits of email identified by the BT. More commonly the BT referred to problems that email created for her. Most notably, because of the infrequency with which parents replied to her emails, the BT felt that email did not enable her to be certain her message was getting through to parents.

A little recognition [by parents when I send an email] would be appreciated. I don't want it to be a surprise when your kid fails both my courses. But I don't know if they know that he's failing both. (BT, June 24, 2014)

Also, the BT noted that when parents did not reply to her emails she was left wondering whether they valued the course she taught or not. By the end of the year the BT came to believe that it would be ideal if she created a website to which parents had access in order for parents to be involved in their child's education. She felt that by sharing information on her website parents would have something with which to start a back and forth conversation with the BT. The BT seemed to be an advocate of the website idea to connect with parents because she felt that other forms of connecting were unrealistic; email did not seem to get reciprocal conversations started,

and there did not seem to be enough time for face-to-face conversations. The BT had stated at the beginning of the school year that she felt like it was reasonable to expect parents to give feedback when asked. By the end of the year, even though she still felt that asking for parent responses was reasonable, the BT questioned whether the lack of parent response could be attributed to student disinterest, parent disinterest, or both.

### **School Influence**

The specific context of the working environment in which the BT worked was found to have some noteworthy characteristics. The BT noted the importance of the support she received as she began her career, the influence of her colleagues on her thinking, and the expectations that the school's administrators had for the teachers in the building.

### **Support**

The BT noted that having support was important for her as she began her career. During an interview at the beginning of the school year, the BT discussed coaching the girls' volleyball team at her school. The BT noted that it was nice to have a co-coach because she appreciated having someone to support her thoughts, especially when speaking with parents (BT, October 2, 2013). By the end of the school year, the BT once again noted that having colleague support was valuable to her and expressed some apprehension at the prospect of coaching without it the following season, especially considering she felt a conflict with some parents might be possible. Also, as noted below in the Induction Supports and Professional Development section, the BT was thankful to have the support of colleagues she could reach out to for advice as she began her career (BT, October 2, 2013).

Aside from support from colleagues in the teaching profession, the BT mentioned that support from parents was also appreciated. After a confrontation with an angry parent during a

volleyball match, the BT reported that parents were on hand to provide moral support to her through short conversations. After this situation, the BT reported that parents were more willing to have conversations with the BT and express their thanks for the job the BT had done.

All the parents were supportive of us, except for this one mom at this time. And so it was really good for us to talk with the other parents. Or not even talk with, but just they were giving us good feedback...Just parents coming up after and just giving us little pats, like saying, "Good for you. I'm sorry you had to deal with that. You dealt with it well." That sort of thing...The parents were really appreciative of the fact that their grade 10 daughter was able to play on the last tournament still. And so they just voiced that sort of thing.

Which was good. (BT, November 4, 2013)

### **Colleague Influence**

Overall, the BT reported that her colleagues had little to say on the matter of parents. When asked directly if she had heard any stories about parents from her colleagues she replied that she had not, nor had she asked her colleagues for any stories (BT, November 4, 2013).

When asked at the end of the year, the BT reported the same, noting that neither parents nor making connections with parents were topics that got discussed much at her school.

For the most part, there's not much talk in the senior end about parents. Or about making connections, whether it's negative or positive. I guess in the middle years more, I hear one teacher in particular saying, "I have got to call this person," or "I want to touch base with this person by the end of the day." A lot of them have communication books that they send home back and forth. Which I haven't had much to do with...We don't talk about it very often...It's not a topic of conversation. (BT, June 24, 2014)

In fact, since discussion of parents was so limited, the BT was largely unaware of any of the practices of her colleagues in regards to communicating with parents. When asked if she knew of any colleagues who contacted parents simply to make connections as opposed to communicating when there was a problem, she was unsure of what occurred with other teachers. She assumed there was a lot of email communication originating from teachers about general class updates, but doubted that teachers were communicating weekly about issues that related to specific students because the BT did not feel there was time to facilitate this practice.

I don't know. I think there's a lot of update emails. Like this is what we've been doing and this is what we have planned. I mean that's easy to send out often. But to take the time to write a – I mean we do that during report card comments, but to do it every week for every kid, you'd never have the time. (BT, June 24, 2014)

This is not to suggest that the BT was never involved in any conversations with her colleagues about parents. The BT did note that she had engaged in conversations with colleagues about watching what was said to certain parents, about parents who resisted an education plan for their child, and about specific parents who would require special attention. When asked about the accuracy of prior warnings she was given about specific parents, the BT reported that sometimes the warnings were in fact necessary, while other times the warnings proved to be unneeded because the parent was very agreeable (BT, November 4, 2013). Other communication with colleagues regarding parents seemed mainly to be about sharing information and creating a plan to address a student's needs (BT, June 24, 2014).

Another point of conversation that occurred between the BT and her colleagues was about the first set of parent-teacher interviews. Initially, the BT found while she was preparing for the forthcoming interviews none of her colleagues were talking about the interviews.

Eventually, the BT grew apprehensive and felt she needed some information, so she approached a colleague. Upon doing so, she reported that the experienced colleague she spoke with told her that interviews were not a big deal and that she would be fine. She said that he seemed very unconcerned about the entire situation.

No one has talked about interviews. Like even when I went into [my colleague's room] – he's been teaching there for 30 years probably...he's close to retirement. And he's the one I asked, just because he's next door, about interviews. 'Cause I said, "I'm kind of getting a little bit stressed, like I'm not sure what I should be doing." And he said, "Oh it's not stressful, you'll be fine." He was just very nonchalant. (BT, November 4, 2013)

After that, the BT had a couple more conversations with colleagues about interviews, where she learned the logistics of the interview process, and that the prevailing opinion among her colleagues was that she would be bored for the evening interviews as she could expect few parents to attend. In a research interview the day before parent-teacher interviews, the BT was asked about whether school administrators had any expectations for her to uphold during parent-teacher interviews. The BT reported that information from administration regarding parent-teacher interviews was minimal. The BT recalled that during a staff meeting directly before parent-teacher interviews the principal had reminded staff to make sure they had good feedback ready to share with parents during interviews (BT, November 4, 2013).

### **Admin Expectations**

Many of the administration's expectations, such as the need for communication between parents and teachers and the expectation that parents be informed about what is happening with their child's education are highlighted in the Parent Involvement and Engagement section. Not

surprisingly, many of these themes are also important to consider when looking at the school's influence on the BT.

The expectation for teachers to communicate has been noted above, mainly by the school's administration and the BT. An experienced teacher at the school where the BT worked also corroborated this finding. According to the ET, it was apparent that administration expected teachers to communicate early and often. For any incidents involving students, it was the expectation that a heads up email be sent home right away to parents in order to keep the parents abreast of developments at school. In fact, the ET reported that administrators were cc'd on emails home to parents. The ET found this to be a beneficial practice to make sure everyone had the same understanding (ET, June 11, 2014). From the principal's perspective, she felt that parents liked getting information from teachers. The principal stated that communication with parents was something she mentioned constantly at staff meetings and that if a student is having problems a phone call should be made. According to her, this communication was important to avoid negative situations with parents if a troublesome situation developed. The principal further suggested that the responsibility to communicate was shared between both the teacher and the parents. Because of this, she made it known to staff that if they wanted support in dealing with a parent the teacher needed to ensure he or she had communicated with the parent in advance. If communication between teacher and parent had not occurred in advance of a parent learning about a problem with their child, then the principal told her staff they should not count on her unconditional support if a disagreement ensued. For the principal, a valuable form of communication with parents also included making sure that teachers had their online marks program up to date so that parents could access that information.

I always tell my staff, communication is never a bad thing. The more you can communicate the better off you'll be. And parents love that communication piece. And I also say to our teachers, I will back you 100% if the communication piece is there. But if a parent walks into this office and we have to call you in to talk about the fact that Johnny has a 32% and there's been no communication, then I've said to them, I'm going to turn with that parent to you and say, "What's going on here?" Because I think our job as teachers is to communicate. (P, May 21, 2014)

Similarly, the vice principal felt that communicating with parents was a top priority for beginning and experienced teachers alike. When discussing parent-teacher interviews, the VP noted that all teachers should have contacted all parents at least once by the time parent-teacher interviews occurred. Continuing the discussion on parent-teacher interviews, the VP stated that communication is vitally important when issues arise. These issues must be addressed, and the first step is that the teachers must communicate the concern to parents.

It's our teachers' responsibility to communicate most of the issues well before any parent-teacher conference. If they haven't and there is an issue, the teacher's dropped the ball because our recommendation is to always communicate. It drives me crazy when they don't. And if [teachers] are hit by surprise, well it might be their fault because they didn't phone [the parents] and tell them or give them the heads up. (VP, November 5, 2013)

Also in regards to parent-teacher interviews, the principal noted that creating a welcoming environment for parents was important. The principal suggested that a welcoming environment might include a seating area outside the classroom for parents who are waiting for an interview, and an area inside where parents could sit to meet with the teacher (P, May 21, 2014).

One last point about communication and interviews was also evident during conversations with administrators at the BT's school. The need to communicate when issues arose was prevalent, while the need to communicate when issues were not present was not as important. This was evident when the vice principal noted that there are times when parent-teacher interviews with some parents are not needed.

We encourage it to be a three-way interview. That being said, the high school students don't always come. More elementary students come, but not always. Some conversations, a teacher needs to just talk about the student. Sometimes that just needs to be done. And some parents that do come are the parents that don't need to be there. There's absolutely no issue. I mean they still have every right to hear about their child, even if it's all positives so that's awesome. But, I think that's the norm in every school.

(VP, November 5, 2013)

The idea that parents only need to be addressed when problems occur was also noted by the BT. She found that parents typically do not initiate communication with her. When asked if parents frequently communicate with the school to simply maintain contact or if they generally stay at home unless there was a problem, the BT replied that she felt that most parents only initiate communication with the school when a problem has arisen that needed to be resolved (BT, June 24, 2014). As a counterpoint, the ET mentioned that parents could often be found in the hallways and common areas in the school when dropping off and picking up their younger children. Parents seemed to be comfortable on the school landscape as the ET reported that parents could often be found in the office chatting, and from time to time had even been seen in the staffroom getting a cup of coffee (ET, June 11, 2014).



## **Induction Supports and Professional Development**

From the interviews and data sources collected for the research study, it appears the BT was exposed to two levels of induction supports during her first year of teaching. School division level supports occurred on various days throughout the school year. Alternately, it appears that school-based induction supports were embedded throughout the year on an as-needed basis.

### **Division-Based Professional Development**

As a new teacher in School Division Y, the BT was involved in the division's professional development (PD) activities focused on supporting new teachers. The agenda for these days, called the Beginning Teachers' Workshop, included meeting the central office staff, introducing the Workshop Model of Instruction to the beginning teachers present, sharing the division's Targets for Engaged Learning document, and working with other beginning teachers on planning so that they structured their courses around Big Ideas and Essential Questions (Division documents). The BT reported that she attended specific PD days set aside for her and other beginning teachers. The BT recounted that on these days she and her fellow beginning teachers learned about the division's priorities and then were given an opportunity to apply these priorities to their own practice. When asked if there was ever any discussion about parents during the division PD sessions the BT noted that there was no explicit direction given on how to deal with, or even general discussion about parents (BT, October 2, 2013). Of the five days of division PD the BT attended, the only PD that related to parents involved discussions around the new report cards that were to be used the following year in grades six through nine.

The division PD was a lot of Targets for Engaged Learning. Which was good. We got some time to do some unit planning. It was wonderful. But we never talked, and maybe

I'm missing something, but we never talked about parent engagement during that. I did go to a comments writing one, and the new report card workshop. So that gave us some tips for dealing with parents for this new report card. (BT, June 24, 2014)

An analysis of the agendas for the division workshop days corroborates the BT's assertion that no parent engagement topics were to be found on these agendas.

The only other mention of division support involved mentors. When questioned early in the year about supports other than the Beginning Teachers' Workshops, the BT was unsure if she was going to get a mentor or not, but had already made some connections on her own. The BT reported that even a month into her first year of teaching she was unsure of whether or not a mentor would be provided to her. She did comment that at the opening division professional development day for beginning teachers one of the beginning teachers in attendance asked if mentors were to be provided, but a definite answer was not given from division personnel. The BT noted that she felt fortunate that she had interned in the same division as she found herself during her first year of teaching; this circumstance allowed her to be in a situation where she had already made connections with teachers who taught the same subject.

I still have made good relationships with my co-op teacher and the teacher who's coming back here after, you know that sort of thing. So I have people that I can call if I'm struggling...I don't think that that's necessarily a role that the division has to provide. But I'm really thankful for the fact that I have made those connections. (BT, October 2, 2013)

### **School-Based Professional Development**

Aside from the division PD, the BT also received support from members of her school. The BT noted that at the beginning of the year she was thankful for the opportunity to speak with her administrators about the expectations for staff and students at her school. Specifically

regarding parents, the administration sent out some information about how communication might look. The BT remembered receiving sample emails from the principal that acted as exemplars of good parent communication. The BT described feeling thankful for receiving this guidance (BT, October 2, 2013). Aside from the email exemplars, the BT reported that the main direction from administration involving parents had to do with constantly communicating. At the beginning of the year, the BT noted that the message from her administrators was that communication with parents was very important. By the end of the year, the BT shared that the administrators' message had not changed; teachers were constantly reminded to be in communication with parents. According to the BT the expectation to communicate with parents was paramount if a child was not doing well in a class. The BT reported that it was made clear to teachers by the principal that parents should never be surprised when their child brings home a report card and is not being successful.

We were always reminded to be in communication with parents, especially if their child is not doing well. So there's no surprises, because then you're questioned, "Why all of a sudden?" So that was always good. (BT, June 24, 2014)

Reports from the school's administrators corroborated the findings of the BT. The principal noted that there was not a set message about the role of parents, but communicating with parents was something that she stressed at every staff meeting, especially when a student was having problems. The principal affirmed that she often expressed to teachers that they could not exclude parents from what was occurring within the classroom, regardless of the grade of the student. She further stated that most of the other directions given to staff from administration regarding the role of parents was incidental. These incidentals might include talking to staff about having their online marks program up to date, and to create a welcoming environment for

parents during parent-teacher interviews. Along with the message to communicate, the principal reported that beginning teachers also get some other school-based support to ease them into the profession. Most of the support provided involved preparing them to handle the logistics of the job. The principal reported that the school supports also included help setting up the online marks program; pairing them up with an experienced teacher in their hallway, of which the goal was to give the BT someone of whom they could ask questions; and providing them information on school expectations such as how to communicate with parents, how to prepare for interviews, and how forms should be filled out.

We have a whole process we go through with [beginning teachers]. There's the whole piece around PowerSchool (online marks program). We arrange for the new teacher to have a couple of periods with Ronald, our PowerSchool guru. We talk to them about communication and our expectations around communication. We pair them up with someone in their hallway, the whole mentor thing. So they have someone to ask about some of those daily things. We put a package together with them where they get an example of a permission slip. Then we also do things like, before parent-teacher interviews the VP or I will meet with them and I'll say, "This is what you're going to expect. This is what interviews look like. For parent-teacher interviews, have two or three chairs sitting outside. Get yourself an area where you've set up so that you and the parents can sit. This is what your report cards are going to look like." We have expectations for teachers' comments, that one is curriculum based. You can't just put, "Good work being done." We give them heads up about parents. If you've got a difficult family or a difficult situation they get that. But I don't think there's ever any specific direction on what to say [to parents]. (P, May 21, 2014)

## **Summary**

In this chapter the relevant data from the research was presented. Data were offered that examined the challenges of being a beginning teacher, the distinction between parent engagement and parent involvement, the origin of the beginning teacher's beliefs about parents, communication experienced by the beginning teacher, school influence on the beginning teacher, and induction supports and professional development the beginning teacher experienced.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This research project was guided by four research questions. What follows is an analysis of the pertinent findings, organized according to the four research questions.

#### **Q1 – BT’s Initial Experiences Interacting with Parents**

The BT had numerous experiences with parents as she worked through her first year as a professional teacher. As outlined previously, the BT interacted with parents in her role as classroom teacher, coach, and staff member. Similar to the findings of Shumow and Harris (2000), the majority of communication originating from the BT with parents was in written form via email, though the BT also communicated with parents by phone, and in person during formal interviews, casual conversations, and one heated disagreement. From the multitudes of interactions with parents that the BT experienced, she reported some important understandings.

During her experiences as a first year teacher, the BT seemed to employ a questioning stance about her practices with parents, a situation promoted by Kroeger and Lash (2011) as being beneficial in facilitating reflective practice. As such, the BT noted that her experiences with parents gave her a much deeper appreciation of the reality of her job and how parents fit within her work. Prior to the start of her career the BT felt that it would be possible to create authentic relationships with parents where she could learn the values of individual families and incorporate these into her lessons. She believed that parents would be open to the opportunity to communicate with her and ask questions about the needs of their children, all characteristics of positive partnerships supported by the research of Henderson and Mapp (2002).

The BT reported that the reality she experienced throughout the school year was different from her initial belief. What she experienced was closer to the realities reported by Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) who found that as children age there are declines in the quality of parent-teacher interactions. Frustration as a result of failing to feel that a difference is being made is typically found with new teachers (Angelle, 2006; Rosenholtz, 1989); the BT experienced frustration when she would send emails home to parents notifying them that their child had missed class and would not receive a reply to her communication. Similar to the finding of Mills and Gale (2004), not receiving a reply from parents left the BT wondering if parents valued or had interest in the class that the BT was instructing; unlike many other teachers in the Mills and Gale study, the BT did not attribute lack of participation from parents as an indication of laziness on the part of the parents. Lawson (2003) found that it is typical that teachers have an inability to communicate effectively with parents, and this situation is seen by parents to be a barrier to effective partnerships. The BT did report that she had experienced some difficulty making connections with parents, partly due to her feelings of being overwhelmed with the responsibilities associated with being a teacher new to the profession. This was due somewhat to the fact that the BT carried the same teaching load expected of an experienced teacher even though she possessed far less experience, a theme evident in the research literature on beginning teachers (Angelle, 2006; Van Nuland, 2011; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008).

The BT noted that she struggled with determining the appropriate amount of information to send home to parents, and the amount of communication that would be reasonable. She further reported that the volleyball parents with whom she interacted at no point made any requests to have more input into how decisions were made on the team. Even though the BT noted

examples of times when parents provided valuable input and times when parents gave her positive feedback on her performance, she did not appear to be satisfied with the results of her efforts at creating relationships with parents. Ultimately she felt that, while it was important to seek input from parents, parents did not seem to take advantage of this opportunity.

The reasons parents appeared disengaged to the BT are not entirely clear. It may have been because the parents within this study did not feel they wanted or needed to be involved to such an extent with the education of their child. As Mills and Gale (2004) found, some parents simply trust that the teacher is educated and will know what is best to do. This may explain why parents were not quick to respond to the BT's emails and offer their suggestions or thoughts about the needs of their children or express their children's observations regarding courses the BT taught. Another possibility is that the opportunity for parent input that the BT felt she was making available was, in fact, not received in the same spirit by the parents. Studies by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) and Shumow, Lyntukh, and Schmidt (2011) both reported that invitations from teachers have been found to have a significant positive impact on parent involvement at school. Perhaps the way the email communications were crafted were not effective as invitations and therefore did not leave enough of an opening for parents to feel comfortable giving input. The BT noted that the majority of her emails to parents gave general information about where the course was headed and closed with a brief invitation to respond if the parents were so inclined. If the email communications had been structured in such a way that a more direct invitation for input was extended to parents, perhaps in the form of direct questions, more parents may have felt comfortable giving the input that the BT stated she desired. The BT's predominant reliance on one type of communication can be seen as a failure to heed Pushor's (2010) advice to issue multiple invitations, multiple ways, and multiple times to parents. Since parents did give input



on other occasions and the BT noted that when parents gave input relationships formed, there is evidence to suggest that the BT's initial belief that parents would appreciate an opportunity for input may have been accurate. When meeting face-to-face, the BT noted instances where parents made valuable contributions and where relationships seemed to develop, a finding supporting by the work of Henderson and Mapp (2002). Perhaps the issue was not with the motivation of the parents, but with the execution of the offer for input. It may have been a failure by the BT to follow Pushor's (2010) advice of acting as a host and inviting parents multiple times and in multiple ways. Finally, perhaps at least part of the issue with parents not responding may have been, as Lawson (2003) found, that the students saw their parents' involvement as a negative, which lead to a decrease in parent engagement.

Even though initially the BT believed that parents would want to be involved, she did not seem to have had any concrete expectations of how parents would act with her. By the end of her first year, the BT had developed a set of assumptions about what constituted typical parent-teacher interactions. She reported that parents were unlikely to respond to emails, did not have ample time or inclination to meet with her outside of the school day, would not always welcome meetings with her that did not revolve around an issue that needed attention, often waited for her to initiate communication, and were much more apt to engage in conversation when face-to-face encounters occurred. Originally, the BT had thought it would be possible to meet with parents outside of the school day in an informal setting to build a relationship with parents. She envisioned opportunities might exist for a parent and her to meet for coffee during a weekday evening to discuss the child and share experiences and values. The BT reported at the end of the year that this was no longer a held belief. The BT felt that her inability to meet with parents could most often be attributed to logistics. She felt that parents were as busy as she found herself

to be, and meeting for coffee outside of the school day was simply not practical. The principal commented on this as well, noting that she felt that BTs did not allow themselves enough time to contact parents. While Mills and Gale (2004) did report that one of the reasons that parents do not participate in school activities is because they are busy with other commitments, they further found that other reasons were also readily available to explain poor or no parent participation. There seemed to be no recognition on the part of the BT of the other factors reported by Mills and Gale for poor parent participation, such as the parents past negative experiences with school, the parents belief that they did not possess the requisite knowledge or skills to comfortably get involved, the parents belief that teachers were educated and would therefore know what was best for their child, and the parents belief that their voice was not one that mattered.

Since the BT believed that time was a barrier for meeting with parents, it is not surprising that the BT further reported that she felt uncomfortable scheduling time to meet with parents that did not revolve around a student issue. She seemed to believe that if there were not clear issues to be discussed and resolved then parents would feel the meeting was a waste of time. Interestingly, the BT did not offer any experiential evidence that would support her belief. She did not recall any specific instances where she had attempted to meet with a parent on or off the school landscape to build a relationship and the parent had declined. In fact, she offered evidence that would be expected to lead to her holding a contrary belief. The BT noted a very positive interaction with a parent that occurred when the parent attended interviews. The parent used the meeting as an opportunity to signal to her child that the parent valued education, and communicated this intention to the BT. This is similar to the finding of Uludag (2008) that a positive parent-teacher partnership can signal to the child the importance of education. Instead, the BT's belief seems to have been largely based upon what she imagined parent responses

would be. Likewise, she reported only positive feelings about parents as a result of chance meetings and conversations that occurred with parents; these meetings could be categorized as relationship-building interactions. Therefore the belief that parents are too busy for, or have no interest in meeting outside of the school day to partake in a relationship-building conversation does not seem to have been shaped by the BT's experiences.

Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) found that when a teacher's beliefs do not match their actions, sometimes school contexts play a part. Perhaps then, the belief that parents would not want to meet either comes from a belief based on innocuous comments by colleagues, or uneasiness with attempting something outside of the established normal parent-teacher interactions at her school. In the case of the former theory, the BT did note that on at least one occasion a colleague told to her that parents were unlikely to show up for interviews because they did not care much. While the colleague's belief that lack of parent involvement on the school landscape would find support in many U.S. schools, this same understanding is not held in all cultures (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Also, Mapp (2003) determined that parents feel they are involved in their child's education in ways that school staff members fail to recognize. Even so, the assumption that nonattendance indicates a lack of caring may have led the BT to conclude that parents would not value having a conversation with her and therefore if the BT contacted parents to meet for coffee this would be seen by the parent as an imposition. In addition, Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2001) demonstrated that inexperienced teachers often give up their efforts if they are not immediately successful; perhaps because the BT felt that her efforts would not be immediately successful she was unwilling to invest in the risk of contacting parents to set up a meeting. As well, there has already been ample evidence presented that it was an expectation at the BT's school that parents be contacted when issues

arose with their child. Because of the consistency of this message, the BT may have come to believe that the only truly valuable communication, or perhaps welcome communication that could occur between parent and teacher would revolve around an issue that required a resolution. The BT's thinking may have been further shaped by the comment she recalled from a parent who reported to her that on one occasion when the parent showed up to a parent-teacher interview and there were no issues to discuss about her child, the teacher seemed to be annoyed that the meeting had been scheduled. Consequently while the BT's belief that parents do not have time or inclination to meet to build relationships outside of the school day is not informed through her experience, it is likely shaped at least in part by the attitudes she was exposed to during her first year of teaching.

Furthermore, the BT's reluctance to attempt a relationship-building encounter with parents outside of the school day may have been because it was not something typically attempted at her school. The BT could report no instances of other teachers attempting this type of activity, nor could she recall examples of teachers initiating any meeting with parents at the school where the primary objective was to build relationships. Aside from the Meet the Teacher evening, the BT had no exemplars to draw upon from her specific school context when trying to envision what this might look like, and no evidence to lead her to believe that what she wanted to do would be accepted by her colleagues as normal.

Since the BT did not have any overt support with her initiative to create relationships with parents, it is reasonable to suggest that she may have lacked the confidence to make an attempt. She may have believed that parents were too busy for a meeting in order to give herself, what she deemed, a valid reason to avoid making an attempt to have a relationship building meeting with a parent. As demonstrated in the situation where the BT exhibited a lack of

confidence and decided not to schedule a parent meeting for the volleyball team she coached, lack of confidence appears to have been one of the factors that lead to the BT's avoidance of parents and limited the BT's ability to form authentic relationships with parents. This finding supports the work of Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2001) who reported that teacher efficacy is an important variable that supports increased invitations to parent engagement; if teachers feel more confident then they will be more likely to invite parents to participate in parent engagement activities. The finding also backs the conclusion of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) who noted that beginning teachers are often uncomfortable with their limited competence and having to perform for parents. As evidence, the BT noted that she hoped to gain more experience in order to help her feel more comfortable speaking with parents. Her actions can also be explained by research that demonstrated that teachers often shy away from situations where they have the opportunity to be criticized (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989). Interestingly, the lack of a parent meeting to gather parent voice at the start of the year may have been a contributing factor to the heated altercation that occurred between the BT and a parent at the end of the volleyball season. As noted by Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2005), if there is no positive communication that occurs with parents then the only communication that is likely to happen will be during times of frustration and dissatisfaction. Had the BT initiated a conversation with the parent earlier in the year, perhaps the outcome of the disagreement could have been different.

Another factor that may have contributed to the BT's perceived lack of success with creating relationship-building encounters with parents was the disposition of the parents. It is very possible that since parents had little to no experience with relationship-building encounters with teachers at School X, that the parents' uncertainty with how such an encounter might look

could have been a barrier. Similar to the finding by Ashton and Cairney (2001) where tacit authority was given to the school by parents who felt they should not interfere, perhaps the parents had become complacent with their defined role within the school's environment and were not comfortable moving beyond these expectations and therefore gave no signals to the BT that a meeting would be preferable to them. This may have led the BT to feel that her efforts at creating opportunities to attempt relationship-building opportunities with parents would have been in vain. Whatever the ultimate reason for her avoidance to attempt a meeting, the BT did report feeling a disconnect between what she expected her parent interactions to be like and the reality of those interactions.

## **Q2 – BT's Prior Beliefs that Inform Understanding of Parent Engagement**

Since personal beliefs influence perceptions and understanding of events, and eventually shape behaviour (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2001) an understanding of the BT's prior beliefs is necessary to fully appreciate the findings of this research. Throughout her first year of teaching, the BT was consistent in many of the beliefs she held as she entered the profession. Unlike the findings of Baum and McMurray-Schwartz (2004) and Pushor (2013) who determined that many preservice teachers assumed parent relationships would be challenging, early on the BT spoke excitedly of wanting to create relationships with parents and wanting to invite parents' input into the classes that the BT instructed. Echoing Mapp's (2003) and Pushor's assertion that building relationships needs to be the focus of parent engagement, the BT felt that two-way communication with parents would be ideal and considered home visits as a method to facilitate the building of relationships. Baum and McMurray-Schwartz (2004) asserted that many preservice teachers see parents solely as a resource to help the teacher in the classroom. While the BT did feel that parents could be of value in providing information that

would help the BT with her job, the BT displayed an understanding of the role parents could occupy. Further to this belief that a relationship was necessary, the BT also reported that she felt there should be a feeling of equality between parents and her. The BT felt that shared decision-making between parents and her would be possible, a belief similar to Pushor's (2009, 2013) assertion that teacher knowledge should be used alongside parent knowledge. By having a shared decision-making philosophy, the BT hoped to create a beneficial situation where both parents and teacher were able to have their expertise recognized as legitimate (Lawson, 2003). By the end of the year, despite having an open and public negative interaction with a parent, of which the BT made note on two separate occasions, the BT reported holding these same parent engagement beliefs. The BT's willingness to pursue parent engagement initiatives is unlike many beginning teachers who, as they gain experience, seem to come to value parent involvement but not parent decision-making (Uludag, 2008). Also, dissimilar to the findings of Ashton and Cairney (2001) who noted that many staff try to align parent views with their own, the BT felt that parent input was still something she valued and that parent viewpoints had a role in helping the BT make decisions about her classroom. Similarly, she was consistent throughout the year in her belief that parents should occupy a place in the education of their child.

While the BT's beliefs regarding parent engagement seemed to remain consistent throughout her first year of teaching, the most pronounced difficulties for the BT involved putting the beliefs into action. Though her fundamental beliefs about parent engagement remained unchanged, by the end of the year she expressed some uncertainty in her ability to make effective parent engagement a reality. At the beginning of the year the BT expressed a simultaneous belief that she had a set of parent engagement strategies she was willing to try, and an uncertainty about what the outcome would be of her parent engagement initiatives. By the

end of the year this was reversed and she knew what the outcome of her efforts had been yet expressed uncertainty that she had learned parent engagement strategies that would be fruitful in the coming year. Her first year of teaching did not change her belief that parents need to be involved with their children's education, but did demonstrate to her that her current practices needed to be refined in order to achieve this goal. This finding suggests that there may be a need for teachers who are beginning their first year as a professional to be exposed to more practical examples of what authentic parent engagement might look like.

One of the reasons the BT attributed to her unchanged belief in the value of parent engagement was that she took an undergraduate-level university course that focused on the role of community and parents in the education of children. Unlike many beginning teachers who enter into the profession with no experience to develop their beliefs about parent engagement (Pushor, 2011, 2013), the BT noted that it was through the activities and experiences she had during the undergraduate course that she developed an appreciation for the role that parents can play in the education of their child. The BT was somewhat unique in that she took this class; most beginning teachers do not have the opportunity to develop a conceptual framework of the role of families, to gain exposure to the value of building productive parent relationships, nor are they trained with tools and techniques to communicate effectively with parents (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Had it not been for that class, she doubted she would have been exposed to the set of ideas and concepts about parent and community engagement that she ultimately came to adopt. During many instances the BT made statements about either striving to or not yet reaching the ideal state of interaction with parents. When further questioned about where the ideas behind her desired state of interaction with parents had originated, she quickly pointed to



the university course as the basis of her worldview regarding parents. This was the most important factor reported by the BT that shaped her understanding about parent engagement.

More globally, the BT also noted that she held her belief about the importance of parent engagement because of the experiences with her own parents as she progressed through the K-12 education system. In short, the BT's belief that parent engagement was a valuable endeavor has its roots in the attitudes towards education displayed by her parents. The BT felt that she came from a home where education was very important to her parents. Similar to how many novice teachers hold the belief that their students possess the same learning style as the teacher does (Daniels & Shumow, 2002), the BT noted that the emphasis on the value of education she observed from her parents lead her to believe that the parents of the students she taught must hold similar viewpoints. The BT reported that she held this understanding because her parents consistently demonstrated to her that they cared about her education and held high expectations for her performance at school, which Jeynes (2010) noted has a larger impact on academic achievement than parents being on the school landscape. Even though her parents, especially her father, were not often on the school landscape interacting with teachers, the BT was keenly aware that her parents were interested in her education. Her parents participated in the opportunities to interact with the school that they were offered, but did not push for more opportunities. She attributed her parent's contentment to the fact that they felt she was doing well, and that they had many other priorities in their lives that occupied their time. This prior experience may also help inform why the BT did not feel that parents would have time to meet with her to have a relationship-building meeting. It is likely that her remembered childhood experiences suggested to her that it was not imperative to have relationships with parents; parents can be engaged with the school without having significant connections with their child's teachers.

It seems that the experiences that the BT had with her own family influenced her understanding of how parents fit within a school environment, and specifically off the school landscape.

### **Q3 – School Culture’s Influence on BT’s Understanding of Parent Engagement**

Newcomers into a group often learn the culture of an institution, situation by situation, through instruction by established group members (Schein, 2004). Even though Alhija and Fresko (2010) reported that the culture of the school was the biggest influence of teacher socialization, Barth (2007) pronounced that school culture has more impact on learning than any one single influence within the school’s organization, and Angelle (2006) stated that school culture largely determined whether or not a beginning teacher’s experience was positive or negative, from the reports of the BT, she felt that the school culture of School X had very little influence on her understanding of parent engagement. It is not to say that school culture had no impact on the BT; more that the BT felt that the school culture that was present was very rarely concerned with the role of parents. This is somewhat surprising considering that as teachers gain experience they typically become more pessimistic about their ability to counteract, what they view as, negative influences from home and family (Daniels & Shumow, 2002), while at the same time, more often than not, the culture codes of a school are passed on to the new members of a school by the established members of the group (Baum & McMurray-Schwartz, 2004). It is tempting to try to apply the findings of Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, and Quinlan (2001) and suggest that in this study the BT may have had coercive colleagues that caused the BT to isolate herself and to play it safe behind closed doors, but in this situation there is no evidence that the BT felt that she was actively avoiding conversation with her colleagues. The few comments from colleagues that involved parents that the BT could recall, she perceived to be neutral in nature. The BT noted that she was largely unaware of her colleagues’ practices regarding interactions

with parents. Similar to the findings of Rosenholtz (1989), the BT was apt to report that parents were simply not discussed amongst staff members.

Though the BT may not have reported that the school culture influenced her beliefs and assumptions, there is evidence to the contrary. Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin (1993) reported that successful first year teachers often adopt the dominant ways of thinking and acting in order to fit in, and this may have been the case with the BT. The dominant thinking in School X appears to never have been explicitly explained to the BT; most of the thinking was revealed through interactions with colleagues and the school's administration. One such time where the dominant thinking revealed itself occurred before parent teacher interviews. The BT found that heading into her first set of parent teacher interviews there was no unsolicited advice given to her from her colleagues regarding the philosophy of parents' place within the education system, or even the logistics of preparing to meet parents. Evidence provided by the ET supported the fact that parents were rarely explicitly discussed among staff. The most common discussion involving parents that occurred among staff happened during staff meetings. The staff of School X was consistently reminded by the principal to communicate early and often with parents, especially in the event where an issue with a child was imminent or in progress. Explicit discussions about the roles that parents might occupy within the education of their child were not present. It appears as though the act of silencing (Fine, 1987) may have been in play at School X, since support for parent engagement initiatives was not overt. The school's cultural influence could be seen when members of the school talked about parents as partners or spoke of creating partnerships with parents. Lawson (2003) felt that partnerships with parents occur when teachers recognize parents' knowledge as legitimate and vice versa. Unfortunately, the evidence gathered during the research study did not match this definition. Instead, when parents were given

information so that they could help teachers accomplish the school's goals, parents were serving the agenda of the school. Both Murphy and Pushor (2004) and Ashton and Cairney (2001) noted that when the school defines parents' roles a true partnership is impossible. The school's implicit message to the BT about how to interact with parents, what information to share with parents, and expectations of parents' roles likely influenced the BT's thinking and was probably a factor in her inability to find effective parent engagement strategies by the end of her first year of teaching. The BT had opportunities to witness how the school represented parent involvement activities as true engagement, and witnessing this may have had the effect of negating her understanding of what authentic parent engagement entailed.

Clues about the role of parents in School X were revealed during conversations with the school's administrators. The principal commented on a finding similar to Shumow's (1997) that parents did not have adequate educational training to comment on all facets of the educational programming for their child; this belief, similar to Ashton and Cairney (2001) who found that many schools solely determine the role of parents and Pushor (2009, 2012) who determined that those who are not well positioned on the school landscape are subject to the decisions of school officials, would seem to indicate that parents were expected to fulfill roles that the school deemed appropriate. As well, the idea that parents do not have the proper knowledge to comment on all facets of the educational programming is similar to Pushor's (2012) work detailing how schools view themselves as protectorates. The principal and vice principal further stated two beliefs echoed in the research of Daniels and Shumow (2002). The principal believed that the role of parents did not extend to commenting on what were appropriate curricular choices and teaching strategies, while the VP believed that parents did not need to worry themselves with attempting to teach academics to their children at home. When the VP listed a

number of roles that parents engage in at the school, all of which involve parents carrying out tasks that the school has determined are important, she was unknowingly supporting the findings of Murphy and Pushor (2004). As well, the VP's suggestion that there are some parents who do not need to attend parent-teacher interviews hints at Murphy and Pushor's assertion that when teachers claim that they do not need to see some parents, this is reflective of the teachers' beliefs that parents are involved in education to fit the agenda of the school. Likewise, the stance of the administrators supports Mills and Gale's (2004) and Lawson's (2003) findings that opportunities for parents to participate in schools are often decided, and therefore constrained, by the school. Extending this is Souto-Manning and Swick's (2006) assertion that if a school culture signals to parents that they have limited roles, teachers will find it very difficult to have meaningful parent involvement.

The administrators of the school never once explicitly characterized parents as antagonists who interfere with the teacher's ability to educate their child, as is the case in some schools (Murphy & Pushor, 2004), though they may have inadvertently sent the message to the secondary staff of the school that parent engagement was not a priority. This state of affairs seems to be consistent with Cutler's (2000) notion that schools have taken over many of the decisions about education that once historically belonged in the domain of parents. Perhaps this overlooking of parent engagement as a priority in the high school at School X stemmed from a focus on accountability, rather than responsibility. Noddings (2009) points out that when there is a focus on accountability, or an upward compliance, it diminishes the role of responsibility, or the need to respond to those in our care. In this research context, the persistent message to communicate with parents when issues were forming or present likely sent the message to the BT that accountability was favoured over other forms of communication. The fact that teachers

in School X were instructed to meet the basic requirement to communicate if there was an issue may have sent the message to teachers that they did not have the responsibility to communicate with the purpose of creating authentic relationships with parents. In this type of culture it seems reasonable to suggest that the BT did not have the support she required to further develop her parent engagement beliefs and actions.

Interestingly, it appears that though parents fulfilled the roles and served the agenda created for them by the school, even within this environment the BT reported holding a different belief for the role of parents in education. Because of the scarcity of discussion concerning parents' roles, it seems that the beliefs about the roles of parents in education that the BT entered the profession with went largely unsupported by her colleagues. The nonchalant response she garnered from her colleague when questioning him about upcoming parent teacher interviews likely deterred the BT from starting conversations about parents with colleagues. Somewhat surprisingly, in an environment largely devoid of colleagues considering parents' roles, it seems that the BT's prior beliefs were still part of the narrative for her as she progressed through her first year of teaching; the fact that her beliefs went unsupported likely led to her frustration with her inability to implement effective parent engagement strategies. Montecinos et al. (2011) found that a preservice teacher's beliefs play a very important role in determining how she makes sense of her environment; this finding may help explain, in part, why the BT's prior beliefs about the role of parents persisted in a culture that was more focused on parent involvement activities.

#### **Q4 – Induction Programs' Effect on BT's Understanding of Parent Engagement**

The research supporting the use of induction programs with beginning teachers is clear; well-developed induction programs can have positive effects. Successful induction programs

can result in successful socialization leading to more competent and committed teachers (Alhija & Fresko, 2010), increased teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), and more student-centered thinking on the part of teachers (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfem, 1992). With the benefits of induction programs well known, it is not surprising that the BT experienced both division and school level induction supports.

The division-based induction supports experienced by the BT included workshop days where the priority areas for the school division were introduced and developed. The workshop topics were centered on planning courses and incorporating instructional strategies with which senior administrators expected the BT to become acquainted. Similar to research conducted by Shumow and Harris (2000) where there was little institutional support to involve parents, the BT reported that parents were not discussed during these sessions; this assertion was supported by an absence of any parent-related topics on the agendas for the division workshop days. In the area of parents, the induction supports provided to the BT seem to be, as Molner Kelley (2004) found many induction programs to be, superficial. This is not to suggest that induction supports were not provided. The BT reported a deep appreciation for the material presented, the support she received, and the time provided to work on the initiatives; these induction supports met many needs the BT had. It was simply that parents and parents' roles were not the focus of the division-based induction supports provided to the BT.

Likewise, school-based supports met a variety of the BT's needs, yet did not explicitly address the role of parents in their child's education or the topic of parent engagement. On the other hand, the school-based supports offered to the BT did little to alleviate her difficulty reconciling her parent engagement beliefs with her actions. As noted previously, the explicit school-based information that came closest to addressing parent engagement was advice to

constantly communicate with parents, especially if an issue needed to be resolved. The overall induction supports regarding parents offered to the BT seems typical of many systems where poor or distorted teacher training is an issue (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

The value of having a single mentor or multiple mentors for a BT is supported by a number of researchers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Huling-Austin, 1992). While many beginning teachers reported a need for yearlong induction programs that include a mentoring component (Brock & Grady, 1998), the BT reported that even though there was discussion of having a mentor at her division-based induction workshop a mentor never emerged. Instead, the BT experienced inconsistent mentoring, a situation that Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota and Pesenti (2009) found to be similar to many Saskatchewan schools. As reported by Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2008), the school culture and context have a large influence on what mentoring looks like in a particular school. Though offering assistance to a new teacher is important to signal to new teachers that they are not alone (Alhija & Fresko, 2010), in the BT's school the BT was simply assigned a mentor in her hallway that connected with her on an as-needed basis. There was no formal program to follow or outcomes to achieve. It may have been a missed opportunity to help the BT grow in her ability to connect with parents. Walker and Dotger (2012) found that only with help were preservice teachers able to identify and develop effective communication strategies. Likewise, Danielson (2002) pointed out that successful learning communities involve mentoring, as the process breaks down isolation for beginning teachers, and the resulting socialization allows for better reflective thinking. Alhija and Fresko (2010) similarly reported that mentors were vitally important for BT socialization. While there is a risk that top-down mandating of mentorship activities can limit the beginning teacher's ability to learn through collaboration and develop her own knowledge (Prytula,



Hellsten, & McIntyre, 2010), by having little to no opportunity to have an authentic mentor the BT may have missed out on these positive reflective experiences altogether. Missing an opportunity for reflective thinking is of particular note because it is crucial for teachers to engage in reflective thinking to enable them to develop the ability to suspend judgment and consider information from a number of sources (Danielson, 2002). In this particular research study, it appears that the lack of mentoring the BT received had the effect of allowing her beliefs about parent engagement with which she entered the year to, at best, remain stagnant, and at worst, regress. For example, the BT was never afforded the opportunity to become aware of different types of parent engagement; parents can be engaged with learners (on or off the school landscape), engaged with teachers, engaged with the subject matter, and/or engaged with milieus (McTavish, 2012). By not having a mentor, the BT's ability to further develop her understanding of what positive parent engagement could look like in her specific context may have been limited.

Similar to the situation involving school culture, the absence of induction supports provided to the BT aimed specifically at the role of parents in their child's education likely created a situation where the BT's prior beliefs about parent engagement went largely unchallenged. In the absence of education, direction, or influence from division and school sources, it would seem reasonable that the beliefs about parents with which the BT entered the profession would continue to be the dominant beliefs behind her thinking and decisions. In any case, the induction supports the BT received seems to have had little influence on the way the BT approached, interacted, and considered parents.

## **Summary of Findings Related to the Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how school culture, induction programs, and a beginning teacher's prior beliefs and experiences influence a beginning teacher's understanding of parent engagement. Since the research was conducted under a social constructivist paradigm, the expressed thoughts and reflections of the research participants and the researcher serve as the basis of the findings presented herein. From the evidence presented, the largest factor determining the BT's thinking about parent engagement was the experiences and beliefs she had before entering the profession. Her beliefs came from two sources. The most important of these experiences was the BT's involvement in an undergraduate class focused on community and parent engagement. The BT was quick to note that the experiences she gained while participating in this university class were instrumental in shaping her thinking about the role of parents in their children's education. Through class activities and discussions, the BT established a set of beliefs and philosophies about parent engagement that stayed true from the beginning to the end of her first year of teaching. The second source that shaped the BT's beliefs was her experience with her own parents as the BT progressed through the K-12 education system. She realized that even though her parents were not constantly on the school landscape, they still highly valued her education and were supportive of her efforts.

Alternatively, after the first year of teaching it became apparent that it was much more difficult to create relationships with parents than the BT had anticipated it would be. The BT's strategies to develop and maintain parent engagement seem to need more in context development. Despite having beliefs and philosophies that supported the development of positive parent relationships, the BT ended the year feeling unsuccessful at creating strong parent connections. She felt that parents were not communicating readily with her. There are a number of possible

reasons for this. The BT identified time as a barrier, as she felt that parents would be too busy to meet with her. As well, it is likely that the BT lacked confidence in creating meeting opportunities with parents since she had few exemplars upon which to draw. Finally, the parents in the community may have been disposed to believe that at the secondary level their input was not needed, and therefore did not value communicating with the BT.

As well, school culture seems to have played a role in shaping the BT's beliefs, assumptions, and actions in ways not recognized by the BT. The explicit message espoused by the school's administration, to contact parents when issues arose (without corresponding consideration of contacting parents at other opportune times), and her colleagues indifference to considering parents as part of the educational program may have led the BT to doubt her belief in the importance of creating authentic partnerships with parents. Without any parent engagement examples to follow or colleagues to call on for help or advice, the inadvertent message was likely sent to the BT that parent engagement was not a priority. For a novice professional learning to teach, this environment could not have supported the BT in her efforts to effectively engage parents and likely delayed her growth in the area.

The data suggests that the weakest influence on this BT's understanding of parent engagement can be attributed to induction programs. This is somewhat unexpected considering the large body of literature purporting the importance of induction programs on shaping beginning teachers' thinking. In the specific context studied in this research project, the induction components that the BT was exposed to had little to no attention paid to the topic of parent engagement. Therefore the prior beliefs of the BT, in regards to parent engagement, likely remained unchallenged by these induction supports. There may have been a missed

opportunity to further develop the BT's understanding of parent engagement through mentoring or other induction supports.

### **Implications**

There are a number of implications resulting from this research study. To begin, there are factors to consider when creating teacher induction programs and working with beginning teachers. Professional development aimed at beginning teachers should take into account the prior experiences of those teachers. The professional development that is offered to new teachers should be differentiated to meet the needs of groups of individuals. If a teacher has no understanding of a parent's role within the school system, then this lack of understanding must be addressed. Alternatively, if the teacher already possesses a solid understanding and beliefs about how parents can be partners in education, then time and effort can be directed elsewhere, such as effective practices that can be employed to engage parents.

Specific experiences should be afforded to new teachers. It would seem wise to ensure that all beginning teachers have exposure to parents off the school landscape. Experiences such as these will help to ensure that teachers new to the profession have a more thorough understanding of how parents can be actively involved and/or engaged in the education of their children without being at the school. Hopefully these types of experiences with parents would dispel the myth detailed by Mapp (2003) that parents do not care about what happens to their children while they are being educated at school, and help new teachers understand the finding of Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) who noted that many low socio-economic families are not comfortable on the school landscape. With a solid base understanding of how parents can interact with the school, especially off the school landscape, teachers can then continue to grow their understanding of parent engagement.

As well, new teachers would benefit from having access to other professionals who are employing parent engagement strategies that successfully create relationships with parents. One of the research findings from this project is that the greatest difficulty the BT faced was matching her beliefs about parents with her actions. If she had had the opportunity to learn from someone who was already successful at cultivating parent relationships, then it seems likely she would have had more confidence in enacting some strategies. With a model to copy and from whom to draw inspiration, perhaps the BT would have ended the year with a set of successful parent engagement strategies, as opposed to what she did possess: a desire to be able to successfully engage parents.

Much of what the BT held as beliefs about parents originated from her undergraduate course concerning community and parents. Seldom is it that teacher education programs have a curriculum that includes parent engagement as a major component (Pushor, 2011, 2013), but if it was mandatory for preservice teachers to successfully complete an undergraduate course such as the one the BT completed, then they would have already had access to parents off the school landscape and would have had an opportunity to develop beliefs around parent roles in education. This would serve beginning teachers well and would enable school divisions to feel secure that new teachers had some understanding of parent engagement upon which the school division could build into a more evolved understanding as teachers progressed through their careers. During this class, pre-service teachers could be exposed to topics such as increasing student achievement levels as a result of high quality interactions with parents (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004); the more subtle aspects of parent engagement (Jeynes, 2010); and who holds knowledge, whose knowledge counts, where parents are seen and where they are not, and who does the deciding in schools (Pushor, 2011). The class could also incorporate the

suggestion of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) and provide ample opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain experience extending invitations to families where context is taken into consideration. In addition, not having a class on parent engagement available to prospective teachers sends the message that parent engagement is not important (Uludag, 2008). For these reasons, it would be advisable for teacher education programs to make a class on parent engagement mandatory for all their students.

As well, this research seems to indicate that if beginning teachers experience undergraduate courses such as the ones suggested above, they would still require an environment where their parent engagement beliefs can be nurtured. Because of this, it is imperative that existing and prospective school administrators receive complementary training in parent engagement. Since, as detailed earlier by Schein (2004), school leaders create the much of the culture in an organization, it is important for school-based administrators to have a deep understanding of parent engagement so that they can create and nurture opportunities for beginning teachers and other colleagues to develop positive parent engagement beliefs, assumptions, and effective parent engagement strategies.

More research is needed to understand the interplay between a BT's prior beliefs, school culture, and induction supports. Since school culture can take many forms, it will be important to determine if being placed into a school culture where parent roles are more actively discussed would have more of an effect on either supporting or corroding the influence of a university undergraduate course in shaping the BT's beliefs about parent engagement. Similarly, more research would be beneficial to determine the prevalence with which discussions of parents' roles is typical within secondary schools, and how this affects beginning teachers' understandings of parent engagement.

At the same time, more research needs to be conducted to determine whether the prior beliefs of a BT gained during a university undergraduate course can withstand the pressures of a more active induction program that espouses differing parent views from those gathered during the university course. In addition, understanding how applying more induction supports centered on parent engagement would affect a beginning teacher's prior beliefs about parent engagement, both while employed at a school with a parent engagement culture and while employed at school with a more active anti-parent engagement culture would be beneficial. The interplay between the variables of a beginning teacher's prior beliefs, school culture, and induction supports needs to be further explored to develop a fuller picture of how beginning teachers come to understand parent engagement.

Finally, it would be beneficial to conduct similar research over a longer period of time to determine how enduring the effects of taking an undergraduate course on parent engagement would be. If the BT in this study had been tracked for another school year, more could have been learned about whether she retained her beliefs about parent engagement while she continued to develop her strategies to create relationships. It would be beneficial to understand whether the learning from the BT's undergraduate class would withstand the BT's struggle to find strategies that worked to create authentic relationships with parents; a longer time period would have been helpful in this regard.

### **Researcher Reflections**

It was great to have access to the beginning teacher, the administrators of the school, and another experienced teacher to get an understanding of what was occurring with parent engagement and teacher induction at School X during the 2013-2014 school year. Getting information from different data sources allowed for cross-referencing and gave a deeper

understanding for the researcher. Likewise, it was advantageous to be able to track the BT's thinking on parent engagement over the course of her entire first year in the teaching profession. It provided a fuller picture and deeper reflection than what would have been available from research conducted over one semester. If time had allowed it, extending the study for another year could have been valuable. It would have interesting to determine whether the BT's beliefs about parent engagement that originated from beliefs she held prior to entering the teaching profession would have withstood another full year. There exists the possibility that the culture of the school may have revealed itself more fully and had a more overt influence on her, or she may have changed her beliefs if she continued to struggle to find authentic parent engagement strategies that she viewed as successful. Alas, the scope of the research did not allow for this extension of time.

While all the evidence collected for this research study seems to indicate that the role of parents was not a topic often discussed at the BT's school, it would have been beneficial to have the opportunity to get a greater understanding of what the common understanding of parent engagement is at School X. If more time had been available to observe the interactions and conversations of staff at the school and analyze the thinking present, perhaps a more comprehensive picture would have appeared. The culture of the school seems to have acted in such a subtle manner that the BT was unaware of the effects. If the culture of the school were better known, this influence would be better understood.

It also would have been beneficial to better understand the beliefs of the BT's cooperating teacher from her preservice internship. As Rozelle and Wilson (2012) noted, cooperating teachers' beliefs can have a profound influence on their interns' beliefs. Though the



BT made no mention of being influenced by her cooperating teacher, if the cooperating teacher's beliefs about parents were known it could have further enlightened this research study.

The opportunity to do this research was extremely important for me and caused a change in the way that I understand beginning teachers and the needs they have. The findings from this research have changed my perceptions about the importance of uncovering the experiences and thinking that beginning teachers carry with them as they begin their careers. I now realize that beginning teachers are not blank slates who can be molded in whatever fashion is desired. Instead, they have a number of prior experiences that will cause them to act in certain ways and hold certain beliefs. For me, this means that before we start instructing beginning teachers on what to do, we need to discover what they think. This finding also speaks to the importance of providing experiences for beginning teachers that can push teachers towards evolved thinking about parents and their roles in the education system. If we can create these positive experiences of parents when teachers begin teaching, hopefully it would reaffirm those who already hold a positive view of parents, and perhaps reshape the thinking of those who hold the opposing view. If offering these experiences can indeed positively shape beginning teacher thinking, administrators have a largely untapped strategy to influence the thinking of beginning teachers and shape it in constructive and productive ways.

In my view, what appears to be needed most is a more intensive approach to educating beginning teachers about the role of parents and parent engagement. It seems wise to me to include the opportunity for beginning teachers to gain a range of experiences which develop their understanding of how parents can be engaged with their child while off the school landscape, and how this knowledge impacts how teachers define their role when working with parents. Because this area appears to be often ignored, there is a unique opportunity to create something positive

and ultimately very beneficial to support beginning teachers. It is not as if a structured program about parent education needs to be opposed; this is simply a chance to steer new teachers in a positive direction. We owe it to all partners in education to further explore where we might proceed to make this the norm of how we educate beginning teachers.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Interview Questions for Beginning Teacher**

## **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Beginning Teacher**

The essential question to be investigated is how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement.

To better understand this phenomenon, the following questions will guide interviews with a beginning teacher.

1. What experiences have you had with parents?
2. What do you recall of your own parents' involvement while you attended school?
3. Tell me a story when parent engagement was positive. Other examples?
4. Tell me a story when parent engagement was negative. Other examples?
5. What are the benefits of parent engagement?
6. What are the disadvantages of parent engagement?
7. What role should parents occupy in the education of their children?
8. What expectations are reasonable for parents to have of teachers?
9. What expectations are reasonable for teachers to have of parents?
10. What supports (school-based, division-based, etc.) have you received as a beginning teacher?
11. What supports (school-based, division-based, etc.) have you received for interacting with parents?
12. What advice/strategies for interacting with parents have you learned from other teachers?
13. What advice/strategies for interacting with parents have you learned from administrators?
14. What stories have you heard from established teachers about their interactions with parents?
15. Do the school's policies and procedures help you succeed, or are they a hindrance?

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions for Administrators**

## **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Administrators**

The essential question to be investigated is how beginning teachers develop their understanding of parent engagement.

To better understand this phenomenon, the following questions will guide interviews with administrators.

1. What role should parents occupy in the education of their children?
2. What expectations are reasonable for parents to have of teachers?
3. What expectations are reasonable for teachers to have of parents?
4. What supports (school-based, division-based, etc.) do beginning teachers receive?
5. What supports (school-based, division-based, etc.) do beginning teacher receive specific to interacting with parents?
6. What advice/strategies for interacting with parents would you have for a beginning teacher?
7. What stories do established teachers share about their interactions with parents?
8. How important are a prospective teacher's parent engagement beliefs?
9. What kinds of teachers succeed in this school?
10. What kinds of teachers fail in this school?
11. What is the vision this school is hoping to achieve?
12. Tell me a story when parent engagement was positive. Other examples?
13. Tell me a story when parent engagement was negative. Other examples?
14. What are the benefits of parent engagement?
15. What are the disadvantages of parent engagement?
16. What are the challenges that beginning teachers face in general?
17. What challenges do beginning teachers face specific to your school?

## **Appendix C: Culture Walk Instructions**

## Instructions for Completing a Culture Walk

Thank you for agreeing to complete a culture walk of your school. You will be recording your thoughts about what you see and hear (and what you do not see and hear) while observing in your school during a specific time interval. You are looking for some of the physical signs of your school's culture. Please also describe the meaning behind what you observe. For example, if two teachers are talking, is this an example of collaboration, or an example of two staff members possibly excluding a third staff member?

### The Basics:

Take a walk around your school and record what you see and hear. As well, record anything that you do not see and hear that you think is noteworthy. For example, if you notice students in a math class, but they never once discuss or work on math, you might possibly make a note of this. You may choose to record your observations as voice notes (possibly on your phone), or you may make physical notes either during your walk or immediately upon returning from your walk. Find a recording system that works for you – but make your notes as soon as possible to avoid forgetting to include important thoughts. When complete, arrange to get your observations to the researcher.

### Areas to Consider on Your Walk:

While engaging in your walk, you may want to make note of the following:

**\*\*\*FOR ALL OBSERVATIONS, PLEASE ALSO NOTE THE MEANING YOU BELIEVE THESE OBSERVATIONS HAVE.**

1. Space
  - a. How is space allocated?
  - b. Where are the offices located?
  - c. How much space is assigned for meetings and other opportunities for staff interaction?
  - d. Are seating areas, kitchens, lunchrooms, and restrooms conducive to employee comfort and relationship building?
  - e. How are common areas used?
  - f. How much individual space is given to whom?
  - g. Where are people located?
  - h. Are offices signs of status, meaning the more senior the role, the larger the office? Or are offices assigned to positions that require confidentiality or quiet?
  - i. Do all employees enter the workplace through the same doors?
  - j. Is parking reserved or unreserved?
  - k. Are employees able to congregate outdoors in good weather?
  - l. What else do you notice about the space use?
2. Physical Environment
  - a. Look at the furniture. Is it similar, or is status or level demonstrated by the type and kind of furniture?
  - b. Do employees look comfortable in their space?



- c. What is posted on bulletin boards or displayed on walls?
    - i. Is it personal, announcing upcoming events, or family pictures? Or are the postings limited to government regulations and corporate announcements?
3. What is displayed?
- a. Is there visible evidence that employees have been rewarded or recognized for their contributions?
  - b. What is displayed on desks or in other areas of the building? In the workrooms? On lockers or closets?
  - c. Do employees look as if they have made themselves at home in the workplace? Or do personal items overwhelm the workspace?
4. Communication
- a. Where do people meet to talk?
  - b. Do people have whispered conversations?
  - c. Are doors closed in order to have conversations?
  - d. Do staff members acknowledge each other in the hallways?
  - e. What is the tone of conversations (formal/informal, pleasant/hostile, etc.)?
  - f. What do people write to one another in memos or e-mail?
  - g. How often do people communicate with one another?
  - h. Do staff members visit another teacher's room for face-to-face engagement?
5. Interactions
- a. What interaction between staff members do you see?
  - b. How much emotion is expressed during the interaction?
    - i. Emotions are indications of values. People do not get excited or upset about things that are unimportant to them. Examine conflicts closely, for the same reason.

*As a further note: Look at the people in your school and their dealings with one another with the eye of an outsider. Pretend you are an anthropologist observing a group that you have never seen before. What meaning do you give to your observations?*

These are just a few of the questions to answer when you observe and assess your school culture. If you have other questions that you feel will help you describe your school culture, please feel free to use them.

These instructions were adapted from Susan M. Heathfield's *How to assess your company's culture*. Accessed on June 8, 2013 from <http://www.ultiproweb.net/pdf/whitepapers/howtoassesscompanyculture.pdf>