Peer-Reviewed Paper

"I Think it Stopped Me Being So Opinionated" The Impact of a Family Practicum Experience on Student Teachers' Professional Development

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ABSTRACT: *Partnership between teachers and parents is a central tenet in early childhood education. This belief is included both in descriptions of required teaching practice and of necessary elements in teacher preparation programmes. Suggestions for preparing student teachers for partnership with parents in their teaching role, research on the ways that this occurs and its efficacy are rare in the literature. This paper describes one approach: the experience of a family practicum for student teachers. The rationale for this approach, student teachers' responses to the practicum and implications for early childhood teacher preparation and professional development are discussed.*

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Partnership

Early childhood education identifies partnership with parents as a central tenet (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997; Powell, 1996, 1998). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Ministry of Education reinforces the belief that partnerships with parents and whanau are vital in early childhood education. Teacher-parent partnerships are a requirement of 'Desirable Objectives and Practices' (Ministry of Education, 1998) and in implementing *Te Whaariki* the early childhood curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1996). Within an ecological perspective, the relationships between the home environment and the immediate educational environment have been determined as an important influence on young children's learning and development (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett, 2000). In short, "a major message emerging from the existing literature on early childhood education, is that one cannot consider the two microsystems of family and early childhood centre in isolation" (p. 9).

The potential value of collaborative teacher-parent partnerships for sharing information about children to extend their learning is highlighted by research.

Fleer (1997) studied the experiences of technology in the home on three to five-year-old children's knowledge and concluded that teachers were unaware of the richness of such prior knowledge. Incorporating aspects of children's popular media culture experienced at home can be used to motivate and enhance children's language and literacy learning in the centre setting (Arthur, 2001; Marsh, 2000). It is vital that children perceive, through their observations of parent-teacher relationships, that their home learning experiences are valued. Moreover, when children perceive positive relationships between parents and teachers, these children tend to be more attached to teachers and achieve intended learning outcomes (Elicker & Fortner-Wood, 1995).

It appears to be an implicit assumption that the importance placed on purposeful partnerships between teachers and parents will be evident in early childhood teaching practice. Researchers and practitioners frequently discuss ways to effectively practise and enhance partnership between teachers and parents in early childhood education (e.g. Keesing-Styles, 2000; McBride, 1999; Powell, 1998; Whalley, 2001). However, these rely on teachers having a positive attitude towards parents and families, being skilled in relationships and communication and having a knowledge base that includes study of sociology.

Developing Partnership with Parents

Developing the ability to work in partnership with parents also takes time, effort and experience. The types of relationships developed with parents may be influenced by each teacher's stage of professional development (Katz, 1995a; Vander Ven, 1988). However, the ability of teachers to meet parents' needs and wishes may not be a reasonable initial expectation of novice teachers. Katz (1995b) attributes this to the maturity and broader perspective required working with parents and families as well as children. During earlier stages of career development, she suggests that teachers see children as their primary responsibility, and that relationships with parents are more likely to be authoritarian. It is perhaps not until teachers begin to consolidate their knowledge and experience or make a commitment to a career in early childhood education that they understand and develop the ability to work in true collaboration with parents (Katz, 1995a; Vander Ven, 1988).

Supporting this view, Steele (2001, p. 186) discusses the effect of experience. She describes her first year of teaching as a "power struggle" with parents. She found observing experienced teachers' strategies for working in partnership and discussing these with them helpful. Experience lessened her need to feel in control and increased her confidence in explaining and justifying early childhood philosophy and pedagogy to parents.

However, as outlined earlier, the relationships between the home and the educational setting have been identified in the research, philosophy and regulated practice of early childhood education as a pivotal influence on young children's learning and development. Moreover, the New Zealand Teachers' Council (2002) includes partnership with parents and whanau as one of the professional relationships a beginning graduate teacher must demonstrate. Given this, teachers need to be effective in working with parents much earlier than theories of professional development suggest. As evidence for this view, Mara (1999) reported that for staff working in Pacific Island Early Childhood Centres implementing *Te Whaariki* for children and families was difficult, partly due to their lack of experience working with families.

Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

A fundamental question facing teacher educators is how to prepare student teachers for their professional responsibilities in ways that are consistent with good teaching, and that meets the professional community's expectations of quality educational practice. Teacher education providers are responsible for ensuring graduates are able to comply with both the requirements of teacher registration and the mandated objectives and practices of early childhood education.

In this instance, how can early childhood student teachers be prepared to work in partnership with parents? How much preparation ought to be at pre-service level and what aspects may be appropriate at in-service level? What role might stages of teacher development and reflective practice play? Because most people have grown up and participated in families, it is perhaps incorrectly assumed they have prior broad knowledge and expertise of families. How do student teachers' personal experiences of their own families influence their views of the families they will work with? Such questions led the authors of this paper to examine the literature on preparation of teachers to work in partnership with parents.

Early childhood teacher preparation programme guideline suggestions (Association for Childhood Education International, 1997; Bredekamp, 1996; Hyson, 2002) make specific reference to preparing teachers to work with parents. Yet many early childhood teachers report feeling unprepared for their roles and responsibilities in developing partnerships with parents (Morris & Taylor, 1998) and believe it is important that teacher education prepare student teachers to work with parents (Hutchison, 1994; Laloumi-Vidali, 1997).

The literature on preparing teachers for partnership with parents revealed a gap in current international programme provision. In their review of teacher education for the early years in the United Kingdom, Hevey and Curtis (1996)

identified the ability to work with parents as an aspect not developed in current pre-service programmes. Likewise, in the USA, student teachers were "thoroughly trained in child development, developmentally appropriate practices, and classroom management, ... (but) little emphasis is placed on forming relationships with parents" (Langford & Weissbourd, 1997, p. 152).

The opportunity to link theoretical learning with the reality of practice is seen as a positive practical step in orienting students to working in their chosen field. The following literature describes approaches to early childhood teachers' preparation for partnership that include some practical experience. Henry (2000) outlines an Australian initiative where each student teacher has an opportunity to work with parents and develop a parent education activity. The specifics of the opportunity are not described, but Henry claims "our students gain wider and deeper experience with respect to families" (p. 109). A Canadian programme has addressed preparation through the use of home visits by student teachers (Bernhard, Gonzalez-Mena & Corson, 1997). Other literature refers to student teachers undertaking work in community organisations to provide opportunities to develop competence in working effectively with families (de Acosta, 1996; Morris & Taylor, 1998). Again, this literature is short on what student teachers actually learn and undertake during the experience. In particular, the efficacy of practical experience in terms of developing knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to collaborative partnership with parents appears not to have been researched.

Consequently, although there is recognition that preparing teachers to work with parents is an important part of the professional responsibilities and beliefs that student teachers ought to acquire, suggestions and evidence as to how this might occur are rare. This paper reports on student teachers' perceptions of the value of a family practicum experience in the first year of their professional pre-service learning in a three-year preparation programme.

A 'Family Practicum' Approach

The Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching), offered at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), has 'working in partnership' (with families/whanau, children and colleagues) as a key theme developed through the three years of the programme. Programme outcomes propose that students gain first-hand experience of working in families. As Hutchison (1994, p. 152) noted "students need actual experience with families to begin to understand the need for analysis of social policy. They also need to learn to view parents differently". Epstein and Dauber (1991) recommend that student teachers also spend time with practising teachers to observe and learn techniques to work with parents. To facilitate this, in their first year of study at AUT in 2000, early

childhood student teachers undertook practicum experience in both family and centre settings.

Prior to practicum experience, student teachers studied the sociology of the family, including different definitions of families, their dynamics and functions, and the diversity of families, parenting and childrearing in New Zealand. Relationship and communication skills with adults and children were studied and practised. Particular attention was paid to the concepts of reciprocity and responsiveness in relationships and communication (Ministry of Education, 1996, 1998).

The experience of a family practicum was designed to reinforce theory learned, offer students an opportunity to practise communication skills with parents and children and develop positive attitudes towards the notion of teacher-parent partnerships. These are all prerequisites for effective early childhood teaching. Student teachers were briefed to act in a professional role in establishing relationships and to respect the confidentiality of the placement family. Student teachers spent twelve days over four weeks in a family home (a total of 96 hours), participating in family life and young children's care and education. This experience was supported through critical inquiry and reflection processes during weekly discussion and debriefing, and a lecturer's visit in the family home.

Researching Student Teachers' Experience of the Family Practicum

Educational researchers act on a need to better prepare student teachers for the realities and challenges of teaching practice (Kagan, 1992). The overall research question of the present study (Hedges & Gibbs, 2001) was to explore the impact of the family practicum on student teachers' personal and professional development. There were three expected practicum outcomes:

- Students will gain understanding of the realities of becoming a parent, parenting and family life in New Zealand;
- Students will practise building reciprocal and responsive relationships and communication with children and adults;
- Students will develop a positive attitude towards the concept of partnerships between teachers and parents in early childhood education.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical issues can arise when lecturers research their own students. Student teachers generally have a tendency to be passive and demonstrate reluctance to challenge the status quo (Pajares, 1992). To ensure voluntary participation, and

assist anonymity and confidentiality for the participants, the researcher took no part in recruiting participants or interviewing student teachers. Without the presence of the researcher, who was also the practicum co-ordinator, the researcher predicted student teachers might be less likely to provide answers, comments and discussion that were influenced by what they might think the researcher wanted to hear.

The research technique involved "student-teacher-talk" (see Garmston & Wellman, 1998) where the language used was meaningful to them. Student teachers interviewed each other with pre-arranged focus questions that were peer reviewed before use. The interviews occurred six months after the family practicum. The participants verified the transcripts (transcribed by a person not associated with the research) before they were released to the researcher, and were given the opportunity to provide comment on the results before publication.

Although there were fourteen student teachers eligible to participate in this study, due to various factors outside the researcher's control, only five students completed interviews. Participants chose their own pseudonyms. These students ranged in age from 18 to early 30s and only one had previous experience in early childhood education. Given the small number of participants, further detail about the students is not included to preserve confidentiality and reduce the likelihood of identification of either the participants or the placement families. The data were analysed thematically and inductively. The five students' responses were analysed according to the three criteria of the expected practicum outcomes. Internal consistency was achieved by consensus between the judgements of the researcher and project supervisor.

The limitations of this research include its exploratory nature and the small sample size. The research did not explore issues such as cultural 'fit' (Morris & Taylor, 1998), relevant to the multi-ethnic nature of the New Zealand population. As the methodology involved peer interviewing, opportunities to probe responses that an experienced interviewer may have employed did not occur. As a result, this limits the extent of insight into students' knowledge, beliefs, explanations and justifications for views expressed. While their views cannot be described as typical of all the student teachers, they provide interesting results with regard to the goals and expected outcomes of this experience, and insights for future teacher preparation and professional development. In reporting the results, verbatim narrative is used to enable the student teachers' voices to be heard.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Realities of Parenting

Many student teachers may have limited knowledge and experience of parenting.

> I didn't have a great understanding of home life in families, apart from my own memories from my own childhood. *(Jane)*

By experiencing the realities of parenting and family life in a professional role, it was expected that student teachers would develop an empathy and understanding that enabled them to work more effectively in partnership. In relation to the first expected outcome: *students will gain understanding of the realities of becoming a parent, parenting and family life in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, understanding of these realities is revealed in the following comments:

> I've learnt that it is very stressful, being a parent. Especially if you're ... partner's at work ... and there is just you. And coping with twins, cause she had twins that were under a year old and honestly, I feel like if she didn't have me there or some other help, how would she cope? Because it was so insanely busy all the time. The whole day just went so quickly, because we were just so busy with the children. ...Yeah, I learnt that it is... very intense, and it required a lot of you, time and everything. *(Wilma)*

> Being up close and personal with a family that had two children .... Seeing their day-to- day lives and how they deal with having two children. How the parents have to cope with working around having two children, daycare, crèche, those sorts of things. *(Sarah)*

> I got to see the family juggling their life around the children. They had three children .... So just seeing the mum trying to juggle her life around work and raising her children, and the father, the same thing. Yeah just basically their hustle bustle personal things that affect the family. *(Jane)*

The practicum experience raised for students a realisation of the stresses and intensity of being a parent that may influence personal and professional change. Moreover, Jane found that the experience of the reality of parenting had challenged her attitudes:

> I think it stopped me being so opinionated .... because I was very judgmental I think, in centres, if a child turned up with scruffy hair or ratty tatty clothes. But then when seeing the kid at home, trying to get them dressed in the morning, they just weren't going to put on

> that piece of clothing, the parent would say 'okay, go like that'. I got to see that from a different perspective, and stop being such a snob about the whole thing.

Jane's experience encouraged her to reconsider her attitude and response as a teacher upon a child's arrival at a centre. She revealed empathy towards the parent's situation that may impact positively on her attitude towards developing a positive partnership.

However, the participants suggested that neither they nor their peers were fully aware of the rationale for the first outcome of the practicum.

> I don't know what the point was. Maybe to try and get a perspective on family backgrounds. *(Fred)*

> Then again, there's heaps of people on our course that (were) really angry about having to do it, because they've already got children. They've just been through that whole process and they just really felt out of it, but I thought it was valuable from my point of view. *(Wilma)*

Munford and Sanders (2001) succinctly note in relation to this:

> The simple fact that we may all have grown up in a family of some kind does not mean that we all have an equal appreciation of the family experiences of others. Nor does it mean that we have an equal appreciation of the way in which this experience influences both the lives of individuals and our collective life as the society *(p. 100).*

One student stated:

> Every individual family works differently because they have all got different morals and expectations for bringing up their kids and things. *(Wilma)*

The family practicum is one way that student teachers can extend their experience, appreciation and understanding of different families. In turn, this may assist development of a broader perspective of societal roles and responsibilities, including the professional responsibility of teachers to construct positive teacher-parent partnerships. If the family practicum is to be meaningful for student teachers in promoting teacher-parent partnerships, the rationale and purposes must be clearly understood by student teachers.

Fred questioned whether or not a 'natural' family environment had been experienced:

> Because, I was actually there, and it was very hard to be objective and just to see how they are working in there, because you are intruding in their lives, and the mother might be putting on a show for you. So, it might not be, this particular person where I went, might not be an average (person) of normal society. Like it could be somebody way out, you know, in their views, and how they bring up kids.

Fred's comments suggest that this student may have been thinking deeply about the nature of the experience. Alternatively, Fred may not have acquired the ability to interpret the experience through professional eyes and perhaps demonstrate a lack of understanding of family diversity.

The experience of working with families appeared to be viewed through the lens of personal family experience. Barney and Wilma shared the following exchange:

> Wilma: What are the ways that families work that are different to your own experience?
> Barney: (Could you) explain that question to me before I answer it, because I don't quite understand it?
> Wilma: Well, to your experience in your family, so like your experiences when you grew up as a child.
> Barney: Families, I don't think were any different to what my family did. I have four children in my family, and we all had to get on.
> Wilma: So there is no difference between the family that you went to and your family?
> Barney: No, it was run the same as my family.

Barney's comments can be seen as a 'mirror' response. The practicum experience has been interpreted through the eyes of personal family experience. As with Fred, this perhaps also reveals a lack of understanding about the diversity and dynamics operating in different families or a lack of ability yet to analyse aspects of parenting such as childrearing practices.

The value of student teachers articulating, exploring and reflecting on their own family experience in professional ways may enable them to develop a more professional lens with which to view the practicum experience. Connelly, Clandinin and He (1997) suggest a number of ways in which student teachers' personal practical knowledge may be revealed. Among these, the use of family stories, annals and chronicles may be particularly useful.

Practice Building Relationship and Communication Skills Central to Partnership

Early childhood teachers have reported experiencing difficulty in implementing purposeful shared communication with parents (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999; Laloumi-Vidali, 1997). Yet as Stonehouse (1991, p. 22) warns, when parents and teachers do not work together, "each is relating to the child without the whole picture". The second expected outcome was that *students will practise building reciprocal and responsive relationships and communication with children and adults.*

Barney and Wilma's responses suggested the experience was valuable towards achieving this outcome:

> I feel that it enhanced me professionally. I practised relationships and communications and working in partnership with parents and I also really enjoyed working with the children in a home setting. *(Barney)*

> I felt that I developed good relationships with the adults .... It was really just the Mum and the children. I got on really well with the mother and she talked to me quite a lot about issues and family environments and things, how she feels and everything. ... I got on well with the children, and ... I thought it was good. Valuable. *(Wilma)*

In contrast, Fred practised communication, but was unsuccessful and revealed difficulties with the practicum:

> Well, with the adult... she had such a dominating personality that I felt threatened by her. I was uncomfortable with her, I felt like I couldn't get a word in edgeways. It was a difficult relationship.

Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) suggest that various notions of knowledge, power and expertise influence teacher-parent partnerships. Fred's comment reflects this complexity. Being in the position of a student teacher perhaps further complicated Fred's experience.

Implications for teacher educators who are responsible for professional practice components about their own relationships and communication were also suggested in Fred's comments. Perhaps Fred did not feel comfortable about raising these concerns with a visiting lecturer or during debriefing discussions. A similar consideration was that Sarah felt that the family she was placed with was so used to having student nannies, that the different expectations of student teachers were unclear:

> It was definitely a bit of an issue because it was almost like they resented that we weren't nannies and we weren't there to do what a nanny is there to do, and they weren't quite sure what we were there to do actually. Almost like they needed more direction exactly what we were there to achieve.

Parents attended a practicum briefing meeting and were supplied with written documentation about the purposes of the practicum, even if they had had student nannies previously. AUT had a history of utilising families as practicum experience for student nannies. Lecturers developing and maintaining relationships with these families and establishing clear and prompt communication processes for both the families and students had helped allay any concerns and address ethical issues that arose for students and families in the past. However, it may be necessary for a university lecturer to make personal contact with each individual family prior to the practicum to clarify roles and expectations and alleviate potential concerns. This may become more critical as, having discontinued the nanny programme, the number of annual family placements per student was reduced to one. Therefore, the existing and ongoing relationships are likely to dissipate over time.

Beliefs that Impact on Partnership

Previous literature has identified negative attitudes in the professional interactions that teachers undertake with families (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud & Lange, 1998). Laloumi-Vidali's (1997) study concluded that teachers' views on partnership "are related directly and specifically to their own views, beliefs and experience rather than to available information about the issue" (p. 24). The third expected practicum outcome was: *students will develop a positive attitude towards the concept of partnerships between teachers and parents in early childhood education.*

Positive attitudes to the development of partnerships were revealed as a result of this experience, including from Fred, whose overall practicum experience had not been as positive as the other participants:

> Well, it is very right working with parents in (the) family (and) centre situation because they are the major caregivers ... it is very important hearing what the parents say, getting feedback from them. *(Fred)*

> I feel that it is extremely important for parents and whanau to work in partnership with teachers and vice versa. I think it goes both ways. I do think this is important because it enhances children's belonging and well being with knowing what they have done at night-time with their parents. *(Barney)*

> I also felt that it enhanced my knowledge and understanding about the link between early childhood centres and home and the importance of including parents and whanau into the centre environment. *(Wilma)*

Renzaglia, Hutchins and Lee (1997, p. 361) claim that teachers with established positive attitudes and beliefs "are more likely to act as change agents in their classrooms and experience satisfaction in their roles as teachers". The effect of the beliefs expressed by these three students is likely to be positive on their development as teachers who value partnerships with parents in early childhood education. Wilma reveals the potential of this personal and professional impact for young student teachers:

> Because I'm 18, I haven't had any previous experience with children ... I found it quite valuable really because I'd never been in a situation like that before. I've got no previous experience in early childhood and I felt, I don't know, I think probably I liked it because I got on with the parents and with the children and everything. I just felt comfortable there. I also felt that it enhanced my knowledge and understanding about the link between early childhood centres and home and the importance of including parents and whanau into the centre environment.

In relation to further understanding the ecological contexts of children's lives, Sarah was one of two student teachers who participated in this study who had been intentionally placed with a family whose child attended the centre she had been to previously for a centre practicum. Sarah reflected on this experience in the interview:

> The family I went to, I'd also worked with at a centre, so I got to see what was going on in the centre and I got to see what was going on at home and the difference in the child's behaviour at home and at the centre, and how the parents related to the children .... Yes, I think a better understanding of the fact that you can't just look at a child as it comes into the centre and just take it from that context, you need to know a little bit about what is going on at home. *(Sarah)*

Schön (1983) promoted reflection as a way for teachers to make meaning and construct personal knowledge to guide professional action. Reflective practice represents a powerful tool for professional growth but may remain at a superficial or technicist level unless teachers are empowered to reflect on practice (Lindsay & Mason, 2000) and deconstruct and reconstruct personal beliefs that impact on their teaching (Gibbs, 1999). Professional journals that record and explore reflective practice may be valuable to assist this (Connelly,

Clandinin & He, 1997) and could be considered for use during the practicum. Sumsion (1999) documents how a neophyte early childhood teacher's relationships with parents were developed during her first two years of teaching. She stated that a commitment to reflective practice was essential in making a shift from survival as a teacher towards reciprocal and responsive relationships with parents.

In relation to all three expected outcomes, these student teachers made comments that appeared to relate to their prior beliefs, conceptions and experiences of families. Research on teacher beliefs has occurred with student teachers, including in relation to practicum experience (Smith, 1997; von Wright, 1997). These studies have concluded that teachers bring enduring beliefs to both teaching and teacher education. These beliefs are based on their life experiences and are frequently resistant to change unless they are challenged (Pajares, 1992; Raths, 2001). Accordingly, challenging existing beliefs, exploring attitudes to families, parents and parenting, and examining the impact of these on the concept and practice of teacher-parent partnership also appear to needed to better prepare teachers for their role.

FURTHER RESEARCH

If the family practicum approach continues, this research could usefully be conducted with another student teacher intake to further assess its efficacy. An outside facilitator with focus groups of student teachers could be used as a technique so that probing opportunities are utilised and more reflective dialogue occurs. It may enrich the practicum experience to interview the parents and children in the placement families and obtain their perspectives for student teachers to reflect upon. A follow-up at the conclusion of the teacher preparation programme by further researching the impact of the family practicum experience on graduates' work as a teacher in the centre setting may also be informative.

CONCLUSIONS

A central commitment to partnership with parents exists within early childhood education philosophy and practice. Parents and families/whanau are an integral part of the early childhood community. An effective practicum empowers student teachers to be responsible learners and develop positive professional attitudes (Yelland & Cartmel, 2000). The findings of the research are somewhat equivocal as to the success of the family practicum approach. Four of the five participants in this study suggest that the experience had some value in that they experienced opportunities and gained insight into families that may impact on

their teaching that were unlikely to be obtained in any other way than by such a direct experience. Their comments indicate that they usefully linked some theory and practice with consequent impact on their development of positive attitudes towards partnerships with parents.

However, at this stage of their teacher preparation, two appeared to lack the ability to self-analyse or reflect meaningfully upon their experience for maximum learning, often relying on personal lenses in which to interpret the experience. While three participants appear to have developed some understanding of the need for committed and collaborative partnerships with parents/whanau, the other two did not yet reveal this. Was the timing of this practicum experience too early in the programme? Would it be more valuable in the second or third year? Or is the view that partnerships with parents develop during later stages of teacher development more valid? Perhaps teacher-parent partnerships may not be a reasonable expectation of beginning teachers? As Katz (1995a, 1995b) and Vander Ven (1988) suggest, the need to re-visit the nature of effective partnerships will be an important aspect of these participants' on-going professional development.

The question also arises of whether or not student teachers could develop the required attitudes and skills for working in partnership in another way. For example the potential learning acquired from the home visit scheme (Bernhard, Gonzalez-Mena & Corson, 1997), community placements (de Acosta, 1996) or a child and family study may achieve the expected outcomes, while also perhaps clarifying more clearly the professional role of the student teacher. More specific detail of students' undertakings, learning and impact on the development of teacher-parent partnerships through these kinds of preparation is required to evaluate their potential.

Nevertheless, this present study also suggested that the family practicum approach has potential as a positive method to begin the development of partnerships with parents/whanau. Lauralia (1997) noted that the use of a practicum experience outside the comfort zone of a student teacher could lead to personal and professional enhancement if utilised well by teacher educators. In confronting the realities of families they were unfamiliar with, some students were challenged to re-examine beliefs and practices. In doing so, they began to develop the necessary repertoire of beliefs, thinking and practice that characterise effective teachers who value partnership. Teacher educators need to actively take account of professional expectations in preparing early childhood teachers for their vocation. They also ought to research chosen approaches to preparing student teachers for partnerships for their efficacy and in order to reflect critically on their own practices. Otherwise, the concept of partnership

with parents risks being merely rhetoric rather than practice with early childhood teachers.

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