

Portals of Promise

Transforming Beliefs and Practices through a Curriculum of Parents

Debbie Pushor and the Parent Engagement
Collaborative



SensePublishers

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Debbie Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative

*Department of Curriculum Studies,
University of Saskatchewan, Canada*



SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-94-6209-384-3 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-94-6209-385-0 (hardback)

ISBN: 978-94-6209-386-7 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858,
3001 AW Rotterdam,
The Netherlands
<https://www.sensepublishers.com/>

Printed on acid-free paper

Designed by Shelly Balbar, the photographic tryptich consists of three variant images of the “Portail de la Promesse,” *The Portal of Promise* (English). Jett, the beautiful young child who is the point of unity in the three images, looks to home, to school, and to the connection between the two landscapes.

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For Candice Brentnell,
a fellow member of our Parent Engagement Collaborative.
Thank you for sharing your intellect, insights, and spirit.
Your voice speaks strongly throughout this book.

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PREFACE

There is a striking sculpture, *Portail de la Promesse*, located in Meewasin Park, along the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon. The sculpture is comprised of two large stone pillars, each unique in size and shape yet positioned in strong balance with one another. The pillars are connected by a ribbon of cascading bronze. When we look through the *Portal of Promise* in one direction, we see the beautiful foliage which borders the river valley. When we move around the portal to look through it from the other side, we see the homes situated across the street from the park. Each view is equally magnificent, equally rich; they exist in harmony.

The *Portal of Promise* speaks to us about our work with parents and families. Children live in two worlds; they reside on the landscapes of their homes and communities, and they spend time in learning and care on the landscapes of their child care centres and/or schools. Like the bronze wave that flows between the two pillars, children move between home and school. As teachers and early childhood educators, how might we also move between home and school, learning with and from families, keeping the view of the home and the viewpoint of the family central in the work we do with children? As teachers and early childhood educators, how might we invite parents and families to also move between home and school, feeling invited and welcomed to share their knowledge and take a place in their children's care and learning on our landscapes? When we stand before the portal, and we puzzle over these wonders, we see the promise of what is possible in child care centres and schools when there is an authentic and reciprocal flow of knowledge between teachers and parents, and when there is shared voice in decision-making about children and schooling. It is this promise that we capture in the stories of our book.

We have taken up the name of the sculpture within the title of our book, *Portals of Promise: Stories of Transforming Beliefs and Practices Through a Curriculum of Parents*. Just as the space between the pillars of the sculpture provides an opening, an invitation to see the landscape from more than one perspective, we intend that our stories will be portals of promise for you, points of entry into a conversation about working alongside parents and families that invite you to see and consider what you do from another perspective, a perspective filled with possibility.

Debbie Pushor
and the Parent Engagement Collaborative



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The only way [we] can see teaching is to be with somebody [we] care about and say, “Why don’t we try it?”

(Franklin, 2006, p. 167)

When we first discussed turning our narratives of practice, drafted for the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*, into book chapters, we were excited about the possibility, nervous about being able to turn our work into a book, yet confident enough in one another and the support we had within the Parent Engagement Collaborative to say, “Why don’t we try it?” As this project unfolded, and our vision for the book crystalized, we recognized that we required the assistance of more people – others we care about – to make the book a reality. To those individuals who joined us on our journey and contributed so much, we want to acknowledge you and offer our heartfelt thanks for your gifts and generosity of spirit, commitment, and time.

Michael McGarity: Debbie’s son Teague took a first year university English course for which Mike was the instructor. Seeing the thoughtful, detailed, and insightful ways in which Mike responded to Teague’s work, Debbie suggested we invite Mike to be our editor. We are so glad we did! He has read our work hard, challenged our thinking, asked important questions, and offered knowledgeable advice. Our chapters are richer and more polished as a result of Mike’s patient editing.

Shelly Balbar: Shelly has been the creative designer of Debbie’s presentation materials for many years now. Not only does she bring her many talents to a project, she works crazy hours, meets impossible deadlines, views anything as possible, and invests her positive energy and love into everything she does. When we decided to use photographs and line drawings in our work, and we saw the complex nature of a publisher’s style guide, we decided to place the layout and design work into Shelly’s expert hands. What a great decision that was! She has worked her magic and created a product of which we are all so proud.

Jo-Lynn Jocelyn: Jo-Lynn pursues photography as a hobby and shines when she has a camera in her hands. She has a way of capturing people in her photos that keeps them very present, keenly visible. We had so much fun together as Jo-Lynn master minded a photo shoot, taking group and individual photos for the book. Jo-Lynn also generously took photos for some of us for our individual chapters. Jo-Lynn has created, and has captured, memories that we will cherish always.

Cole Mewis: Cole is Jo-Lynn’s son and our wonderful photographer’s assistant. He hung out with us for hours, patiently working to capture the shots his mom was

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

setting up. He is also the photographer who captured his mom's image and the photograph of the family of trees for Cec's chapter. Cole reminds us of how rich our work with families is.

Heidi, Matt, Tyler, and Paxton Hale: The Hale family took the beautiful photo for Bonnie's chapter in which we see the adult and children's hands strumming the guitar. We thank them.

Jason Kellington: Jason, Karen Hadwen's friend, took the vivid photo for her chapter in which we see the hands of parents and children forming a circle of love and connection. We extend our thanks.

Our Families: As Debbie worked with us in our Master of Education program, she often said, "It takes a family to get a degree." Well, we have learned that it takes a family to write a book as well. We were able to do what we did because of the love, support, patience, and time our families extended to us. There really are no words to truly express our thanks.

REFERENCE

Franklin, U. (2006). *The Ursula Franklin reader: Pacificism as a map*. Toronto, ON: Between the lines.

“PORTAIL DE LA PROMESSE”

ABOUT THE SCULPTURE



Title: “Portail de la Promesse” (Portal (Door) of Promise, English)

Artists: Doug Hunter and Bryan Lane

Year: 1989

Media: Wathweka stone from LaRonge, SK, and bronze

Doug Hunter is known primarily for large-scale, outdoor sculpture. His rough touch results in images that are visceral and direct, and demonstrate his understanding of his material and its unique characteristics. He explores spirituality and nature in his prairie sculptures. Doug passed away in 2007. (<http://www.gallerywest.info/archiveRowanandSif.html>)

Bryan Lane, a graduate with a Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture degree from the University of Saskatchewan, was a close friend and collaborator of Doug Hunter’s. He was one of the founding members of the Prairie Sculptors’ Association, and shared a studio with Doug for over 15 years. Bryan works with natural shapes and evolutionary processes such as erosion, using a variety of materials: stone, bronze, plastic, concrete, steel, light, fire, and snow. He now resides in his birthplace, the Municipality of Prince Edward County, Ontario.

ABOUT THE SCULPTURE

We have used images of the sculpture and incorporated the sculpture's title *Portail de la Promesse* into our book title with the permission of the City of Saskatoon, owner of the sculpture.

RACHELLE BROCKMAN

ABOUT THE ARTIST



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

“What do you do?” is often a question I elude. “What do you *love* to do?” is my kind of question!

I *love* to observe perspectives from people, nature & architecture. I *love* to convey these perspectives by painting ‘impressionistic moments in time’ with feeling, colour, texture and energy. I *love* painting with acrylic on canvas, paper or wood, palette knives, great music and a glass of wine (or two)!

I *love* that whether through a barren tree, [the doorway] of an old building, a child’s glance or a prairie sky, everything and everyone has an intriguing story to tell.

ARTIST'S PAINTINGS

We want to express our warmest thanks to Rachelle for the privilege of using her breathtaking paintings as a portal to each section of our book:

Section 1: Not So Secret Door

Section 2: 16-3 Fan Tan Alley

Section 3: Cuban Transportation

Section 4: Hangin’ Out

Section 5: Cruz Hanako.

Our book, and our lives, have been enriched by Rachelle’s inspiration.

Visit Rachelle’s website at www.rachellebrockman.com.

FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to write the foreword to this monograph written by Debbie Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative. Over the past several years Pushor has become a powerful advocate for the inclusion of parent knowledge in the education and schooling of children. She contends that parent voices and experiences are integral to curriculum and pedagogy and that strong family school partnerships have many positive effects on a child's educational experiences, including increased student achievement.

When Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and I were co-editing *(Mis)understanding Families: Learning From Real Families in Our Schools*, I realized that Pushor was essential reading to understand the shifting field of home-school-community partnerships. While the majority of the literature continued to emphasize how parents can serve the agenda established by schools, Pushor was questioning, challenging, and introducing ways to work against the status quo in order to renegotiate the place of parents in the education of their children. She has been and continues to be a leader in the work on parent engagement. Her work challenges educational practitioners to examine their taken-for-granted notions and assumptions about parents so that they are able to craft authentic learning opportunities and build strength-based relationships in classrooms and schools.

In this monograph, Pushor stretches us to think in new ways as she introduces a *curriculum of parents*. A curriculum of parents is built upon the premise that both the home and school are places of teaching and learning. While teachers hold knowledge about topics such as subject matter, classroom management, and pedagogy, parents hold knowledge of the teaching and learning that takes place within families in the form of belief systems, attitudes, morals and values, and hopes and dreams. A curriculum of parents honours parent knowledge as being different than, but just as important as, teacher knowledge.

Through a series of three intentionally and purposefully constructed courses, Pushor works alongside her graduate students to create a curriculum of parents. Each chapter illustrates how these educators grapple with their misconceptions about children and families and how they have incorporated strategies into their teaching that allow them to build stronger, more positive relationships with parents. This relationship building is facilitated through activities such as the making of home visits, the creation of family photovoice projects and home learning albums, attendance at community and cultural events, and myriad ways in which learning opportunities became a melding of parent and teacher knowledge. It is amazing to read about the transformation of the teachers and of the curriculum as parents are moved from the margins to the center of their children's educational experience. This is a tale of educational reform from the ground up.

FOREWORD

Each one of these chapters is a gift to be slowly unwrapped and savoured. I am thankful that Debbie Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative have written a monograph that is full of new insights and examples of transformative practice. I look forward to sharing this text with my colleagues and all of the prospective and practicing educators with whom I work.

Dr. Monica Miller Marsh

Dr. Monica Miller Marsh is Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education and Director of the Child Development Center at Kent State University. Her areas of interest include family diversity, the formation of teacher and student identities, and curriculum development. She is co-founder (with Dr. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck) of the Family Diversity Education Council, a non-profit organization. They are currently developing the *Journal of Family Diversity in Education* to be launched in the spring of 2014.



A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

SECTION 1

A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

The portal through which you have just entered into Section 1 is aptly named, *The Not So Secret Door*. In this section, we begin with two chapters written by Debbie Pushor, Chapter 1 *Bringing into Being a Curriculum of Parents*, and Chapter 2 *Planning and Living a Curriculum of Parents*. In Chapter 1, Debbie makes explicit what a curriculum of parents is, and her conceptualizations of “education,” “schooling,” “parents,” “curriculum,” and “curriculum making.” In this foundational chapter, Debbie details why she believes a curriculum of parents is critical in both undergraduate and graduate teacher education. In Chapter 2, Debbie shares the course syllabi which comprise the curriculum of parents she has created. She contextualizes why and how this curriculum was brought into being, and she shares her experiences of planning and then living the curriculum with graduate students. While Chapter 1 is conceptual, Chapter 2 is a story of Debbie’s lived experience with the curriculum of parents.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Nicole Ferguson Marshall and Loranne Young, instructors in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program which prepares students to work in the field of early learning and care, speak of their curriculum of parents. Their chapters detail how they take up the notions Debbie introduces and then live them out in their diverse contexts of a child care demonstration centre and a postsecondary educational institution. In Chapter 3, *It is All Relational*, Nicole discusses how she works with ECE students and with early childhood educators to position relationship as the foundation for the education of young children. In Chapter 4, *A Practicum Journey to Parent Engagement*, Loranne uses the metaphor of a trip to reflect upon the work she did as a practicum supervisor to invite a student to consciously plan for the engagement of parents in their children’s child care experiences. Both Nicole and Loranne make visible what they do and why they do it.

Within Section 1, Debbie, Nicole, and Loranne describe, detail, and then expand the notion of a curriculum of parents as they examine it in the contexts of teacher education, childcare, and ECE education. Throughout their chapters, they express the belief that a deliberate and carefully constructed curriculum of parents is critical to challenging the taken-for-granted positioning of parents on learning and care landscapes.

DEBBIE PUSHOR

1. BRINGING INTO BEING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS



*I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
as long as I'm living,
my baby you'll be.*
(Munsch, 1986)

“I’VE LOOKED AT LIFE FROM BOTH SIDES NOW ...”

Just a short while ago, I watched a portion of the broadcast of the *42nd Annual JUNO Awards* which celebrate Canadian music and artists. I had tuned in to see k.d. lang become inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame. I love k.d. lang’s voice; I love how she uses her voice powerfully as a musician and how she uses it powerfully as an advocate for the rights of all individuals to be their unique selves. Anne Murray, another renowned Canadian artist, delivered the tribute to k.d. lang. As I watched the two singers interact together on stage, I found the lyrics of an old song covered by Anne Murray playing in my head, “I’ve looked at life from both sides

now ...” (Mitchell, 1969). Hearing these lyrics caused me to wonder about the sides from which Murray and lang may look at life. I thought about how their experiences growing up in small, unassuming Canadian towns must give them a very different side from which to look at life than the side provided through their experiences with fame and notoriety. I considered how their frequent barefoot performances on stage over their careers might tell us something about how they look at life from one side while the glitz and glamour of the JUNO Awards ceremony may tell us about another side from which they also see life. lang’s way of looking at life – often stepping outside the flow of mainstream thought to see things from a different side – appears to be reflected in her veganism, and her animal rights, gay rights, and Tibetan human rights activism (k.d. lang). As I continued to watch these two individuals on stage, I was struck by how, for both Murray and lang, their ways of looking at life seem to be influenced by their roots and their place of origin, by experiences that took them beyond those roots, and by conscious decisions they made to see other sides of life as well.

Thinking about my own life, in particular my teaching life, I know that my understanding of teaching was deeply rooted in my early experiences as a teacher, a consultant, and a principal. I knew teaching from my position as an educator on a school landscape. It was a knowing that was solid and certain; one that I valued and that was central to my identity. It was not until I became a mother of a school-aged child that I began to look at life from another side, and to see the school landscape and how teachers are positioned on it from the place of a parent. Already having been an educator for 15 years, I stood with my Kindergarten son in the hallway outside his classroom on his first day of school, his younger twin brothers in their stroller beside me, and I felt, for the very first time, such uncertainty about my place on the school landscape. My previous sense of knowing who and where and how to be vanished as I stood there, positioned as a parent. This was truly an unsettling and an awakening experience for me. As time unfolded and I came to see schooling through the eyes of a parent, I developed a new way of thinking about, understanding, and inquiring into my teaching life, and into teaching lives in general. Now, another 15 years later again, as a teacher educator with a program of research situated around the place and voice of parents and families in their children’s schooling and education, I have begun to bring into being a “curriculum of parents,” which invites other educators to look at their teaching lives from both sides – from that of a parent as well as that of an educator.

WHAT IS A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS?

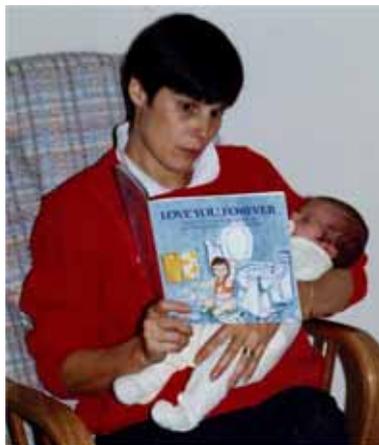
Foundational to the notion of a curriculum of parents is a differentiated understanding of education and schooling and a Schwabian (1973) understanding of curriculum. Also foundational to this notion of a curriculum of parents is the conscious use of language and the particularity of the language use in relation to the differing landscapes of schools and homes. While I see education and schooling as integrally

related, I do see them as different in important ways. And, while the word curriculum is used extensively in the field of education, I believe as teachers we often talk about curriculum with unclear, different, and sometimes even competing or conflicting, understandings of what curriculum is. To honour parents and the essence of what families are about and to honour teachers and the purposes of schooling, I use language that is consciously chosen. I intend for the terms “parent” and “curriculum making” to reflect particular beliefs and understandings. In the sections that follow, I make explicit my understandings of the conceptualizations of education and schooling, of curriculum, of parents, and of curriculum making as they are important underpinnings of my notion of a curriculum of parents. I draw on my stories of experience as a parent to make visible both my intellectual and my embodied understandings of these conceptualizations. In telling my stories, I recognize that they represent Laurie and me in a particular home context as particular parents. In reading my stories, I hope they evoke for you your own stories as a parent and/or the stories of the families with whom you work, as similar to us or as different from us as those families may be. It is, as Bateson (1994) wrote, “contrast that makes learning possible” (p. 27). While each family is unique, the conceptualizations of education and schooling, of curriculum, of parents, and of curriculum making are universal to all of them.

Understanding Education and Schooling

Our oldest son, Cohen, was born in mid-September, at the end of my first year as principal. During my summer vacation in July and August, while I rested a bit each afternoon, I read to my unborn child *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame, 1908/1984). Wanting him to love literature the way I did, I decided to start our story times early in his development. When we brought Cohen home from the hospital, I sat with him in the rocking chair in his room, and as I cradled Cohen, I read him *Love You Forever*, Robert Munsch’s (1986) classic story. That early story time began a ritual that happened many times a day throughout Cohen’s growing up.

Knowing that I would be returning to work in January, Laurie and I decided we wanted to hire a live-in nanny to care for Cohen. It was a very emotional experience to look through the nannies’ files, searching for someone to care for our small baby, someone who we believed would love him the way we did and who would provide him with the rich kinds of experiences we wanted for him. We chose a woman named Liza because she spoke of play and interaction with children, rather than routines and schedules.



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I remember sitting with Liza when she moved into our home and talking to her about all of our hopes and dreams for Cohen. We talked about how we wanted her to talk and sing with him constantly, to take him outside every day, to read to him many times a day, to take him to the library and to swimming, to invite other children over to play and interact, and to hold him and snuggle him as much as he wanted to be held. Our education of Cohen had begun at birth, even before, and we wanted Liza to join us in realizing our hopes and dreams for Cohen's early learning experiences.

Just as with Cohen, education begins at birth with all children. The very second a child enters the world, parents and caregivers begin to speak to her or him, perhaps to sing and read. They introduce the child to significant people, to the environment around the child, and they engage the baby in experiences such as feeding, diapering, bathing, and snuggling. They may take the baby places, play music, hang a mobile above the crib, or create a stimulating environment for the baby in other ways. Whatever they do, whatever form it takes for each unique family, the child's education is instantly, naturally, and authentically underway.

The education the child receives from his parents and caregivers, and in the context of his family and community, starts at birth and continues forever. As Cohen grew, the experiences that Laurie, Liza, and I facilitated for him changed with his development. We added baby and then kinder gym experiences to his days, we enrolled him in an early childhood music program, we took him on bike rides, and we walked with him as he pedalled his tricycle down the sidewalk. Laurie and I had hopes and dreams for Cohen to love books and reading, to be healthy and active, to be a caring person and a good friend, to have an interest in and a concern for the world, and to be thoughtful and well-informed. To this end, we gave him books as gifts, we enrolled him in sports, we played cards and games, we spent time with family and friends, we visited facilities such as space and science centres and museums, we travelled, we walked in the woods, we talked about our work, and we chose to live in different parts of Canada. Cohen is now nearing 23, and he has lived away from home for two or three years. While he is independent, Laurie and I are still engaged in his education as we support his learning about such things as rental agreements, insurance, income taxes, and budgeting. Our education of Cohen began at his birth and it continues. We know there is much more still to come.

As teachers who work in schools, we have the privilege of supporting parents in this life-long task of educating their child from birth to forever. It is important for us to recognize that our provision of formal schooling is just one piece of their child's education. While it is a significant piece, a mandated and formalized piece, if we see the year or sometimes two that we spend with a child as just one piece of his or her overall education, it changes how we understand our work as teachers. When we view our work as teachers as providing a child with an education, we assume "that parents have only a limited responsibility in relation to their child as learner[], ... that the school is the site of the 'main game' ... and we offer parents only a token role in [their] child's education" (Cairney & Munsie, 1995, p. 1). Perhaps we ask them to support their child's learning by monitoring homework, by ensuring their child

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of the discipline. Knowledge of milieus included attention to the school and classroom, the family, the community, and “particular groupings of religious, class, or ethnic genus” (p. 503). It attended to relations between and among children, children and adults, and the various subgroups and communities. Schwab asserted that “none of [the commonplaces] can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and value” (p. 509). He spoke of the relations between the commonplaces as being one of “coordination, not superordination or subordination” (p. 509). (Pushor, 2009, pp. 139–140)

What strikes me so powerfully in Schwab’s conceptualization of curriculum is his understanding of how children’s learning is situated in the context of family and community. When Schwab spoke of milieus, he moved beyond attention to the milieus of classroom and school to recognize that where and with whom children live, and their social, cultural, religious and economic contexts are all significant to teaching and learning. He helped us to see curriculum as a dynamic interplay between particular people--children, teachers, parents, family and community members--teaching and learning about particular things in a rich range of particular places. How, then, do we take up Schwab’s conceptualization of curriculum in our teaching lives and move beyond the milieus of our classrooms and schools to learn about children, their families, their hopes and dreams, and their lives?

In my teaching life, it has been through bringing into being a curriculum of parents that I have been able to “look at life from both sides now.” From my position as teacher and my position as parent, I see how as teachers we can merge what we know about children, teaching, and learning with what parents know, working in relationship to enhance our curriculum for children, to attend to the family’s agenda as well as our own, and to ensure everyone is strengthened in the process. I see curriculum as dynamic and co-constructed:

How I understand and enact a *curriculum of parents* as a teacher educator is as a “living curriculum” (Chung & Clandinin, 2010, p. 180) – one that reflects the intertwining of many lives and of many experiences in the living with and the educating of children. I invite [teachers] to understand a *curriculum of parents* as a curriculum of life (Portelli & Vibert, 2001), but one lived as a life course of action *with others*. I invite them to understand that a *curriculum of parents* therefore becomes a “curriculum of lives” (Chung & Clandinin, 2010, p. 193). In explicitly enacting a *curriculum of parents* in teacher education, I am challenging [teachers] to reimagine what it means to be a teacher and how that might be lived out in the co-construction of curriculum with parents, children, and other family members. (Pushor, 2011, p. 221)

A curriculum of parents, then, is a curriculum in the Schwabian sense of curriculum, where the four commonplaces truly take on equal status. In this curriculum, the lives of the teacher, children, and the significant people in the child’s life all are central in, and inform, the teaching and learning.

Understanding Language Choice

In designing and enacting this curriculum, I have been intentional in my choice of language as I want the language I use to represent certain conceptualizations in the field of education and to step away from others. I want it to represent conscious purposes, to stand on deeply held beliefs and values, to present a vision for education, and to instill a desire for school reform.

WHY A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS AND NOT A CURRICULUM OF FAMILIES?

A child grows up in a family, whatever form that family takes. This family is often nested in communities – geographical, cultural, spiritual, or found or chosen because of common interests or attributes. The members of these groupings all play a role in and shape the child’s life in untold ways, and so they all have an important place in the school’s curriculum. Yet, as with any structure, there are often differentiated roles within a family. The role of parent is distinct in responsibilities and expectations from that of the child or children. In most instances, the parent’s role is more of a caregiving role while the child’s role is more of a care-receiving role. Laurie and I are responsible for and to our three sons in ways that differ from how they are responsible for and to one another as siblings.

Further, just as a parent has a role which is differentiated within the family unit, the parent also has a role that is in relationship with the school in a distinct way from that of other members of the family unit. While our children were in school, it was Laurie and/or me who were, for example, expected to sign medical forms, excuse school absences, or attend parent teacher conferences. In any of these instances, it would not have been deemed acceptable for one brother to play this role for another. Because the role of a parent within a family and because the role of a parent in relation to teachers and to schooling is a role distinct from those of other family members, I have chosen to name this curriculum a curriculum of parents. Interrogating our current hierarchical and unidirectional relationship as teachers with the parents in our students’ lives (Pushor, 2001, 2007, 2012; Pushor & Murphy, 2004, 2010) is central to all aspects of a curriculum of parents.

Who Is a Parent?

I use the term “parent” in the broadest of senses, more in the sense of a verb – one who parents – than solely as a noun. While the term parent denotes a specific person, I use it to denote any person who is engaged in the responsibilities and actions of parenting, whether that person is a biological or non-biological caregiver of a child, whether the caregiving arrangements are formal or informal, permanent or temporary, sole or shared. For many years in our family, Laurie, Liza, and I parented Cohen and then later Cohen, Teague, and Quinn. Liza loved and cared for our boys deeply, just as we did, and all five of us were richer because of it. She made decisions about our

children's early learning experiences, at times with us as we planned activities together and at times without us when we were at work and she was the primary caregiver. I believe we honour those individuals who parent, whoever they may be, when we acknowledge them with the label of "parent." I also believe we honour families when we invite them to define in their own terms the form and membership that constitutes their family, and when we invite them to tell us who their child's parents are.



Where Do We Use the Language of Curriculum, and Why?

Sometimes when we see our teaching life from both sides – from that of a teacher and from that of a parent – we begin to blend our language and to talk about families using school terms. This is something of which I have recently become more conscious and so I am endeavouring to talk about the work of teachers in school terms and to thoughtfully honour parents and families by speaking about them in their own terms.

Earlier I told you about Laurie's and my hopes and dreams for Cohen when we were hiring a nanny for him when he was a baby and as we were considering the educational experiences we wanted him to have as a little boy. We thought and spoke in terms of hopes and dreams, in terms of what we wanted for him. During my research on parent knowledge (Pushor, 2012), I had the privilege of spending time with three families over the course of a year. With each family, something that became evident in our conversation was that they had a deeply-held principle that guided how they lived together. Jessica¹ expressed passionately to me one day, "My children's childhood is so important to me!" As soon as she said it, it became so clear to me how the choices she was making as a parent were reflective of this core

statement: why she chose to work part time, why she spent so much time in nature with her children, why their family all played soccer, why they danced together and made art. In my first meeting with Red, he stated, “I follow the Red Road,” a statement that I did not fully understand at the time. As I spent time with Red and his family, I came to see how deeply situated they were in their culture as proud First Nations people. I learned about the teachings Red was passing to his boys and about how their First Nations ways of knowing and being permeated all aspects of their lives. For Ruben and Shirley, they spoke of how they chose “to do things with their children rather than buy things for them.” They too were a family busy with sports and music activities, and they were engaged with family and church. These families, just as Laurie, Liza, and I did, talked about what they wanted for their children, they spoke about their beliefs and passions, and they expressed their hopes, dreams, and intentions – for themselves as parents and for their children.

When I speak about a curriculum of parents, then, I want to clarify where I believe curriculum is made and by whom. The notion of curriculum is specific to schooling and the use of the term is specific to professional educators; it is not a notion or term that parents use when they talk about their families, their lives, or their children. In the 15 plus years that I have been engaged in research with families, I have never heard any parent speak about the curriculum of their family or about making curriculum for or with their family. As with Laurie and me, and with Jessica, Red, and Ruben and Shirley, families make and live lives; they work to realize their hopes, dreams, and intentions. The term curriculum, then, is a term that denotes the teaching and learning which is planned and guided for the purposes of schooling. It is a school word, not a family word.

While curriculum is a school word that talks about the work of the school, it is important to note that a great deal of teaching and learning happens in the home too. While we could call this teaching and learning the “curriculum of the home” or the “curriculum of the family,” it would be “schoolcentric” (Lawson, 2003) of us to do so. To define what a family does or to talk about a family in school terms rather than in their own terms is to deny the differentiated nature and function of a family. It is to take up a colonial stance in which the knowledge produced and circulated by the school becomes a language of power in relation to families (Loomba, 1998). Such use of a schoolcentric discourse has the potential to subjugate families’ contributions to their child’s education. While curriculum shapes the teaching and learning within schools, it is the hopes, dreams, passions, beliefs, and intentions of parents that shape the teaching and learning within families.

Given that curriculum is a school word, it follows that “curriculum making” is also a school term. Curriculum is made to fulfil the purposes of schooling. This being so, the primary responsibility for curriculum making falls to the teacher. Schwab’s (1973) notion of the curricular commonplaces of teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieus as all being “vital [to] educational thought and value” (p. 503) reminds us that the teacher does not make curriculum in isolation. It is in the teacher’s intertwining of his or her life with the children’s lives, the parents’ and families’ lives,

and the subject matter that curriculum is made. The teacher's curriculum making may begin with building relationships with families and getting to know them. For example, by making home visits, attending community and cultural events in which families are engaged, hosting community-building events at school, facilitating family photovoice projects, or inviting families to share home learning albums, the teacher gains knowledge which s/he can use to make curriculum which draws on the lives of the children and their families. The teacher's curriculum making may be extended further by inviting parents and families into the curriculum making process and drawing on the wealth of parent knowledge and the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) resident in members of the community. In co-planning curricular experiences with parents, teachers create space in which family members become part of the facilitation of teaching and learning activities for and with children. In determining policies and procedures together, teachers and parents stand side by side in the curriculum making, offering distinct but equally valuable knowledge and insights to the planning and development of children's learning opportunities. Curriculum making is a process central to the purposes of schooling and teachers make curriculum in relationship with children, parents, and families.

Curriculum making, in contrast, is not a process central to the purposes of families. Given that parents have hopes and dreams for their children and themselves, they construct and live their lives in ways that honour their beliefs and passions and work toward the realization of their intentions. Just as I have never heard a parent speak of the curriculum of their family, neither have I heard a parent speak of his or her curriculum making. Parents such as Jessica, Red, Ruben and Shirley are purposeful about playing in nature with their children, making art or music with them, being active together, or living in cultural ways. They do not define these activities as curriculum nor do they speak of their facilitation of them as curriculum making. To honour all parents for who they are and what they do and to honour parents and families from their place in the world, it is vital that we speak of them in terms of their hopes and dreams and of their ways of making and living their lives.

WHY IS A *CURRICULUM OF PARENTS* IMPORTANT IN TEACHER EDUCATION?

Undergraduate Teacher Education

The College of Education in which I work at the University of Saskatchewan facilitates a post-internship conference for undergraduate teacher candidates after they have completed a four month term of internship in schools. The conference provides them with opportunities to debrief and reflect upon some of their teaching experiences in the field and to frame questions they may want to inquire into further in their final term of their teacher education program. I have frequently been asked to facilitate a session on working with parents at this conference.

I typically begin such a session by asking the teacher candidates to share stories of their experiences with parents during their internship. Two striking revelations

have consistently emerged from this sharing. First, many of the teacher candidates have had little experience with parents during their four months of teaching, either because parents are not present on the landscape of the school in which they interned or because their co-operating teachers have chosen not to have them participate in experiences such as parent teacher conferences. Second, many of the teacher candidates, at this early stage in their career, have already taken up negative attitudes and assumptions about parents. When I have asked teacher candidates to jot down what they have learned from their experiences in regard to working with parents, so that we can unpack their learning, they have written statements such as, “Never meet with a parent unless you have all your facts documented,” “It’s never a good idea to meet with a parent alone,” and “Be sure you always cover you’re a—.” In discussing their experiences with parents, they have used terms such as “a parent from hell” or “a helicopter parent.” From these discussions, I get an overwhelming sense that teacher candidates see parents as the enemy or people to be feared. They often portray working with parents as a negative part of their upcoming teaching career; as something they realize they will just have to tolerate.

Their attitudes about working with parents and their assumptions about parents as individuals to be feared by teachers are not surprising given that “...most college and teacher education programs do little to prepare teachers to understand and establish relations with families (Black, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Graue, 2005; Kirschenbaum, 2001; Martinez, Rodriguez, Perez, & Torio, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005)” (Patte, 2011, p. 144). Uludag’s (2008) work, as well as that of Morris and Taylor (1998) and Shumow and Harris (2000), further attests to a lack of coursework in undergraduate teacher education designed to prepare teachers to work with parents. When there is not coursework within undergraduate teacher education to interrupt the perpetuation of negative thinking about parents, it makes sense that beginning teachers take up notions about parents that are modelled or conveyed to them by their mentor teachers. Designing and enacting a curriculum of parents for teacher education, then, becomes a conscious act of interruption:

[T]he word interruption [is] derived from the Latin *rumpere*, to break *Interrupting* ... is breaking in on, breaking to put something else in the place of. Interrupting puts something in the place of what came before, as in, “We interrupt our programming for an important message.” (Pushor & Ruitenberg, with co-researchers at Princess Alexandra Community School, 2005, p. 4)

A curriculum of parents becomes a purposeful and sustained means through which to interrupt teacher candidates’ taken-for-granted attitudes and assumptions about parents and to invite them to replace these attitudes and assumptions with conscious and well-considered beliefs about parents, developed in response to a range of readings, discussions, and experiences.

Such efforts at interruption are worthwhile because, as Kroeger & Lash (2011) note, “In teacher preparation programs with adequate course work on family

relations and family involvement, preservice teachers' perceptions of their comfort and competency levels on these topics increase (Morris & Taylor, 1998; Uludag, 2008)" (p. 268). In fact, Fine (2009) asserts that "intentionality and participation [are] crucial elements of lived curriculum" (p. 37). If, in the field of education, we want beginning teachers to take up a notion of curriculum as one in which the commonplace of milieu is ranked equally with the commonplaces of learners, teachers, and subject matter, and if we want beginning teachers to understand curriculum making as a process situated in the lives of children, families, and community, and done in relationship with them, it becomes critical that teacher educators reform current teacher education curricula with these intentions in mind. For me, as a teacher educator, my design and enactment of a curriculum of parents is a reflection of such an intentional reform effort.

Graduate Teacher Education

In 2011, 11% of the full time teaching force and 23% of the part time teaching force in Canada were under 30 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the current 2012–2013 school year in Saskatchewan, there are 678 teachers who are on Step 1 of the salary grid, meaning they are just beginning their teaching careers – 541 working full time and 137 teaching part time. The 678 teachers constitute 5.6% of the active teaching force in the province (Educator Services, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). From this data, it is possible to surmise that, as a maximum, one to two tenths of the teachers in the profession are relatively new graduates from their undergraduate teacher education programs. Even if all of these individuals did experience a curriculum of parents in their undergraduate teacher education, they would be working in schools in which about eight tenths of the teachers were not similarly prepared with intentional curriculum in which to consider their philosophy, pedagogy, and practices in relation to parents and families. What influence might the 20% have on the 80%? What influence might the new teachers have on the experienced teachers in the field?

To enhance the possibility of a curriculum of parents affecting how teachers and parents are positioned in relation to one another and in relation to school landscapes, the design and development of teacher education curriculum at the graduate level becomes another critical piece of such a reform effort. Just as an intentional curriculum of parents can impact beginning teachers' beliefs and practices in regard to their work with parents, it can also impact the understandings and approaches of experienced teachers to their relationships with families. As Patte (2011) attested:

When I began graduate studies in early childhood education, I enrolled in two courses: The Educational Role of the Family; and Families, Schools, and Community Resources. Both drastically altered my approach to understanding and engaging families. I remember thinking that if I had explored such content and competencies as an undergraduate, my first few years engaging families would have been more meaningful and productive ... (p. 145)

BRINGING INTO BEING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

Just as a curriculum of parents becomes an interruption for teacher candidates who are developing a sense of who they are and who they want to be as teachers in relation to parents, a curriculum of parents at the graduate teacher education level interrupts practicing teachers taken-for-granted understandings of the place and voice of parents in their children's schooling. Through their immersion in a wide range of experiences, which are laid alongside new ways of conceptualizing the roles of parents, families, and teachers in children's schooling and education, and contextualized by a wealth of readings, teachers are challenged to consider who they are in relation to parents and families, what they do, and why they do it. They are challenged to look at their teaching lives, and to use fresh eyes to look from "both sides now": their side as teachers and the side of the parents whose lives intertwine with theirs every day.

BRINGING INTO BEING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

My bringing into being a curriculum of parents began on my first day of being a parent of a school-aged child, as I stood at the door of Cohen's Kindergarten classroom not sure of what to do or who to be. It continued as I conducted my doctoral research into the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes and as I began my career as a teacher educator. I have lived out elements of this curriculum of parents in various ways over the years, finding places to add curricular strands to undergraduate literacy and language arts methodology courses, and to examine the notions of parent knowledge and parent engagement in introductory courses in early childhood education and in community education. At the graduate level, I have had the opportunity to talk about my research into parent engagement and leadership and into parent knowledge in multiple offerings of a qualitative research methodology course and of a course on narrative inquiry. Throughout this time, I have continued to live my life as a parent and I have been challenged and informed by my many experiences interacting with my sons' teachers on a range of elementary and secondary school landscapes. All of these rich and varied experiences with teacher candidates and with practicing teachers, and in my multiple positionings as a parent, a researcher, and a teacher educator, have informed my bringing into being a curriculum of parents.

My curriculum of parents has shifted and changed as my knowledge and experiences have grown and deepened – and yet it is still, and always will be, a work in progress. As Grumet (2009) wrote, in reference to curriculum, "All of it has been made up" (p. 25). She asserted that curriculum "is a reflection of the beliefs, the knowledge, the epistemological stance of certain individuals in a particular place at a certain point in time" (Pushor, 2011, p. 220). At this particular place and point in time, I possess certain knowledge and understandings about curriculum and curriculum making. I hold a passionate belief in what parents have to offer the schooling and education of their children. It is in drawing upon this knowledge and this belief that I conceptualize and enact a curriculum of parents.

NOTE

¹ The parents chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

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BRINGING INTO BEING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

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DEBBIE PUSHOR

2. PLANNING AND LIVING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS



To attend means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of. ...I believe that if we can learn a deeper noticing of the world around us, this will be the basis of effective concern.

(Bateson, 1994, p. 109)

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Bringing into being a curriculum of parents has been a celebratory aspect of my teaching life. For years, it was something I envisioned as I researched, read, learned, and talked with others about a reconceptualization of parents' place in their children's schooling. I remember leaving the meeting in which I was told that I could move forward with the development and offering of graduate courses focused on parents and families, knowing that moment was one of significance, a marker in a journey. In Byrd Baylor's (1986) children's book, *I'm In Charge of Celebrations*,

the protagonist in the story describes the kinds of things she considers worthy of celebration:

Friend, I'll tell you how it works. I keep a notebook and I write the date and then I write about the celebration. I'm very choosy over what goes in that book. It has to be something I plan to remember the rest of my life. You can tell what's worth a celebration because your heart will POUND and you'll feel like you're standing on top of a mountain and you'll catch your breath like you were breathing some new kind of air. (n.p.)

As I walked back to my office, good news in hand, my heart was pounding and my entire body was flooded with a sense of exhilaration. It was definitely a mountain-top kind of feeling! I was breathing new air.

It was spring of 2010, and the approval I had just received was from our Deans' group in the College of Education to develop a strand of courses, with a focus on early childhood education, as an offering in our Master of Education program in the Department of Curriculum Studies. Although years of hard work had led to that moment, the decision to move forward with this programmatic offering was made quickly. A collaborative summer institute that I was planning with colleagues from another university, and that I would have co-taught on their campus, was stalled because of complexities such as the need for a memorandum of understanding between the two universities. Our Deans' group was faced with the decision to delay our offerings to graduate students who were interested in early childhood education by another year or to move quickly to develop and offer our own courses that very summer. With significant attention being paid to early learning and care in our province of Saskatchewan and a demand for graduate courses in this area of specialization, the Deans made the decision to move forward immediately. Their decision was a gift; it was the opening I had been seeking to develop specific courses which would bring into being a curriculum of parents.

Under the overarching title, *Situating Children's Learning in the Contexts of Families and Communities*, I developed three courses to comprise a curriculum of parents: *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*, *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*, and a *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*. These course offerings aligned with work being done within the province, and by the Ministry of Education, to enhance opportunities for parents and community members to be engaged in the governance of, and the teaching and learning within, their children's early learning and schooling experiences. The province of Saskatchewan has a long history of funding designated schools as community schools, in order to provide support services – social, health, cultural, and justice – to address barriers to learning. Underlying community schools is the philosophical premise that “a successful learning program includes authentic family and community engagement and draws on the strengths of stable contributing communities” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 1). Building on this core philosophy, in 2006 the Government of Saskatchewan

legislated School Community Councils. School Community Councils were designed to provide a framework for the meaningful engagement of parents and communities in educational decision-making (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2006, p. i). A handbook prepared for Boards of Education and Administrators stated the following:

The rationale for parent and community engagement in public education is obvious and clear. The children and schools are theirs. Parents are the primary educators both philosophically and practically, and for schools to succeed, for learning and well-being to be achieved, community support is required. (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2006, p. 2)

In relation to this general educational backdrop in the province, in 2008 the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education released a new document entitled, *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*, which follows the same foundational belief in the place of parents and families in young children's learning:

Young children experience learning through play and exploration in a variety of settings including the home, child care, Prekindergarten, preschool and other early childhood programs. High quality programs engage children and their families in the planning and delivery of a healthy, safe, culturally sensitive and stimulating program that promotes children's abilities and interests. (p. 1)

With the place of parents and communities positioned as a central pillar in the early learning program guide, there was a pressing desire for graduate teacher education which would provide teachers of young children the opportunity to consciously develop theoretical, philosophical, pedagogical, and practical approaches to their work with parents and families. Through this new opportunity to begin a curriculum of parents, I was able to address such a demand and to contribute to realizing the broader agenda of schooling enacted through community development principles.

DETERMINING THE STRUCTURE

Because I had been working on a compact and intense summer offering with my colleagues, a summer institute framework was in the forefront of my mind. Although Saskatchewan is a province with a small population, it is large geographically. I knew from my conversations with teachers who lived in locations a great distance from Saskatoon and the University campus they preferred an offering that did not require them to drive for hours multiple times throughout the summer. Wanting to offer prospective students two summer courses to provide momentum to their program, I decided to offer *Re/Presenting Families in Schools* in the mornings and *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning* in the afternoons, for a two week period. Because courses are comprised of 39 hours of contact time, this scheduling required the further inclusion in each course of an evening class each week and a

class on Saturday. Students had the choice of taking either course or of taking both courses. In sketching out the two week calendar for the courses, I was aware of how intense the schedule was. I did not realize at the time that the lived intensity of the schedule would be many times greater than the planned intensity visible on paper.

Recognizing that students taking both courses would not have time to do their readings daily, I sent the syllabi to registered students six weeks in advance of the classes. I encouraged them to do their readings prior to the start of the courses and to plan to review briefly each day as the courses unfolded. By beginning the courses in mid-July, I hoped that students would have two weeks to rest and rejuvenate at the end of their school year, as well as have the time needed to immerse themselves in their course readings. By finishing the courses at the end of July, I felt that students would still have a month of summer in which to take vacation time and to complete the assignments required in the courses. I established the end of August as the due date for assignments, although I encouraged students to submit their assignments as they were completed. In designing the schedule this way, I was trying to attend to both the students' programmatic needs as well as to honour the rhythm of their teaching and their personal lives.

In the fall term, following the concurrent summer course offerings, I facilitated the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*. In order for students to enrol in the practicum course, they had to have taken one of the two summer courses. Because the teachers had engaged with a curriculum of parents while they were away from their students and the students' families, I intended for the practicum to be an opportunity for teachers, with mentoring and support, to put in practice new thinking or ideas developed in the summer. I felt it would be a means to sustain and solidify the conversation we had begun around our work with parents and families and to, perhaps, move a curriculum of parents into classrooms and schools as well.

ENROLMENT

While the courses were designed to bring into being a curriculum of parents, as a way of initiating a Master of Education focus in early childhood education, prospective students who expressed interest in the courses came from outside the early childhood education field as well. Some of the interest was precipitated by the move of the Childcare Branch out of the Ministry of Social Services and into the Ministry of Education, creating a provincial vision of learning *and* care as continuous and inseparable. Whereas childcare and education sectors had worked separately historically, in 2010, when the courses were first offered, the two sectors were working in integrated ways under the leadership of the Early Learning and Care Branch of the Ministry of Education. Other interest arose because the courses were situated in community education philosophy and the principles of parent and community engagement. Further interest arose because graduate students in other

departments within our College of Education had the opportunity to take a course as an elective in their program.

While I initially planned the courses with teachers and schools in mind, the rich range of students who enrolled included a community school coordinator, two early childhood education instructors who educate their students for careers in a variety of early childhood roles, a director of a daycare, a Family Literacy Coordinator, an Aboriginal Head Start Coordinator, two vice principals, two international students from China, five teachers of upper elementary and high school students, an early learning consultant, and 9 Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, or primary grade teachers. Of the 25 students who participated in the unfolding curriculum of parents, 20 registered in *Re/Presenting Families in Schools* and 18 registered in *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*. Thirteen students took both summer classes and 13 students participated in the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*. While the planned curriculum continued to provide the framework for the courses, we lived out the curriculum in ways that invited the participants' diverse knowledge, contexts, perspectives, and experiences to influence the particularities of our readings, discussions, and connections. *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*, as an example, also became a conversation about re/presenting families in childcare centers or re/presenting families in schools in China or re/presenting families in First Nations contexts. As our lives intertwined, the curriculum of parents became more personal, more meaningful, and rich with intricacy and complexity.

INTRODUCING RE/PRESENTING FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS

The work on family diversity being led by Monica Miller Marsh and Tammy Turner-Vorbeck significantly shaped my thinking about and my development of the course syllabus for *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*. I was taken by the complex and multifaceted work captured in their two edited volumes, *Other Kinds of Families* (2008) and *(Mis)Understanding Families in Schools* (2010), and by their thoughtful attention to family forms and notions of family through the *Family Diversity Education Council* which they co-founded. I saw theirs, and their colleagues', invitations to others to carefully unpack deeply held personal and societal understandings of families as foundational to a curriculum of parents. While I have always believed that challenging teachers to explore their taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about parents is central to any discussion of parent engagement, Miller Marsh and Turner-Vorbeck's (2008) collection extended that discussion beyond deficit notions of parents to notions of "othering" (p. 2) and to hegemonic notions of families (Heilman, in Turner-Vorbeck & Miller Marsh, 2008, pp. 7–27). I felt that it was important to allot significant time in a curriculum of parents to think about representations of families in curriculum, given how pervasive those representations are, and to think about ways in which parents and family members might be invited into the teacher's and the school's processes of curriculum making.

RE/PRESENTING FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS

As teachers, we must be concerned with, and work to better understand, the families of the children we teach. In order to educate the whole child, we have to be part of a community of learners that includes the family of that child. When we understand that, then we can begin to work at developing educational programs that do not deny what those closest to the child have to offer. We can develop the climate in our classrooms that embraces parents rather than shuns them.

(Brock, in Miller Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010, p. 142)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Representations of families exist everywhere – in literature and media, in our lived experiences of family and stories of others’ experiences, in curriculum documents and subject matter materials. Together we will explore dominant social, cultural, and institutional narratives about families which underpin these representations and consider the influence they have on curriculum-making and decision-making in schools. Through interrogating course readings alongside experiences with families, we will work to interrupt our living out of these dominant narratives as we discover ways to use knowledge that resides in families to co-construct educational experiences for children.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to enhance your understanding of discourses and representations of families and the influence of these representations on curriculum-making in schools. It is further designed to challenge you to rethink and remake your curricular practices in light of this new found understanding. In this course, you will:

- gain a depth of experience in family contexts,
- understand that each family has unique knowledge, culture, rhythm, and context,
- learn ways to respond to the social and learning needs of First Nations and Métis students, as well as students from a variety of other cultures, including immigrant and refugee populations, within a culturally-affirming and family and community-based approach to education,
- explore the practical implications of racism, privilege, oppression, and poverty in educational settings,
- develop a sound philosophy regarding the knowledge that resides in families; learn the benefits for students, families, communities, and staff in schools and child care settings of using parent/family knowledge in decisions regarding teaching, learning, and care; enhance your knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to translate this philosophy into practice,

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- re-conceptualize the schooling and care of children in the context of family and community; learn ways as an educator/child care provider to step out of the school into the community.

COURSE TEXTS

- Cowhey, M. (2006). *black ants and buddhists*. Portland, MN: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Miller Marsh, M. & Turner-Vorbeck, T. (2010). (Eds.) *(Mis)understanding families: Learning from real families in our schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Turner-Vorbeck, T. & Miller Marsh, M. (2008). (Eds.) *Other kinds of families: Embracing diversity in schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE

Class 1: What is “family”? (Monday, July 19th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- notions of family
- “good” mother/“good” father
- dominant narratives of families
- portrayal of families in literature and media

Required readings:

1. Introduction *Other Kinds of Families*: pp. 1–3
2. Chapter 7 *Other Kinds of Families*: Kroeger, J., Doing the difficult: Schools and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer families.
3. Chapter 3 *(Mis)Understanding Families*: Steinberg, S.R., Not the real thing: A history of Hollywood’s TV families.

Class 2: Telling and unpacking our own family stories (Tuesday, July 20th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- family artifacts
- Where I’m From poems:

Lyon, G.E. (1999). Where I’m from. *Where I’m from, where poems come from*. Spring, TX: Absey & Company.

Christensen, L. (2001). Where I’m from: Inviting students’ lives into the classroom. In B. Bigelow, B. Harvey, S. Karp, and L. Miller (Eds.), *Rethinking our classrooms, Vol. 2, Technology for equity and justice* (pp. 6–10). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Required readings:

1. Chapter 5 *(Mis)Understanding Families*: Huber, J., Graham, D., Murray Orr, A., Reid, N., Literature conversations for inquiring into the influence of family stories on teacher identities.

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2. Chapter 6 *Other Kinds of Families*: Miller Marsh, M., Evolving images: Crafting family lives in Colonial Pennsylvania, pp. 103–104.
3. Chapter 6 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Miller Marsh, M. & Turner-Vorbeck, T., A tale of two adoptive families.
4. Chapter 9 *black ants and buddhists*: Seeing ourselves and our families through students' eyes.

Class 3: Interrogating family stories (Wednesday, July 21st, 9–11:50 a.m.)

1. beliefs and assumptions
 - bias and stereotypes
 - othering

Required readings:

1. Chapter 1 *Other Kinds of Families*: Heilman, E., Hegemonies and “transgressions” of family: Tales of pride and prejudice.
2. Chapter 3 *Other Kinds of Families*: Rishel, T.J., From the principal’s desk: Making the school environment more inclusive.
3. Chapter 1 *black ants and buddhists*: Prologue and Introduction.

Class 4: Elder teachings (Thursday, July 22nd, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- With First Nations elders Maria and Walter Linklater
- First Nations view of children/family

Required readings:

1. Chapter 7 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Graue, E. & Hawkins, M., “I always feel they don’t know anything about us”: Diverse families talk about their relations with school.

Class 5: Participation in a Sweatlodge (Thursday, July 22nd or Thursday, July 29th, 5–9 p.m. We will split into two groups.)

- as a way of knowing more of First Nations culture Sweatlodge begins at 6 pm. We will meet for teachings by the elder’s helper at approx. 5:20. Please see *Details of the Summer Sweatlodge* at the end of the syllabus.

Class 6: Explicit, null and hidden curriculum of families (Friday, July 23rd, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- formal and informal curriculum
- considering the total school experience
- planned and unplanned outcomes

Required readings:

1. Chapter 10 *Other Kinds of Families*: Turner-Vorbeck, T., From textbooks to the teachers’ lounge: The many curricula of family in schools.

2. Chapters 5 through 8, *black ants and buddhists*: Talking about peace, Learning through activism, Teaching history so children will care, Nurturing history detectives.

Class 7: Viewing *Born into Brothels* (Saturday, July 24th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- examining the discourse of family in the documentary
- examining Zani’s beliefs and assumptions
- examining the explicit, null, and hidden curriculum of “Kids with Cameras”

We will view the following documentary together and discuss our thoughts, responses, reactions:

Kauffman, R., & Briski, Z. (2005). *Born into brothels* [Documentary]. United States: Think Film Company Inc.

AFTER the viewing, please read:

1. Shah, S.P. (2005, Spring). *Born into saving brothel children*. Retrieved on March 22, 2010 from: <http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=190>
2. Sharpe, P.L. (April 30, 2005). “*Born into Brothels*” stars the good fairy, really, not the kids. Retrieved on March 22, 2010 from: http://whirledview.typepad.com/whirledview/2005/04/born_into_broth_1.html
3. Wikipedia. (n.d.) *Born into brothels*. Retrieved on March 22, 2010 from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_into_Brothels

Class 8: Learning Photovoice (Monday, July 26th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- continue our conversation about *Born into Brothels*, in light of the readings
- discuss photovoice as a methodology
- discuss photovoice as a way of knowing families

Required readings:

1. Allen, J., Fabregas, V., Hankens, K. H., Hull, G., Labbo, L., Lawson, H. S., et al. (2002). PHOLKSlore: Learning from photographs, families, and children. *Language Arts*, 79(4), 312.
2. Library Resource Page: Giovacco-Johnson, T. (2009). Portraits of partnership: The hopes and dreams project. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37, 127–135.
3. *Looking Out/Looking In: Women, Poverty, and Public Policy*, at http://www.pwhce.ca/program_poverty_photovoice.htm

Please peruse this website on photovoice, at www.photovoice.org. Be sure to read about what it is, its purposes, the ethics of doing photovoice, and some of the articles which speak about the ideological and methodological premises on which it is based. (Please excuse the promotion of the organization and requests for donations, as there is good information on the site.)

Class 9: Exploring Formal Curriculum Documents and Resources (Tuesday, July 27th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- curricular aims, goals, objectives, foundational principles
- specific curricula/units of study
- resource materials
- children’s literature

Required readings:

1. Chapter 8 *Other Kinds of Families*: Colabucci, L. & Conley, M.D., What makes a family?: Representations of adoption in children’s literature.
2. Chapter 4 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Lindsey, T.P. & Parsons, L.T., Messages protagonists send us: Families in young adult literature.
3. Saskatchewan Curriculum. https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/curr-english-bb_bb60/index.jsp

(Please review one grade level of curriculum in light of our course readings and discussions on family and on curriculum. What are your observations and insights?)

Class 10: Urban Families and Issues of Poverty (Tuesday, July 27th evening class, 6:00–8:50 p.m.)

- presentation on poverty, facilitated and debriefed by BettyAnne Person, Past Chair, Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition
- poverty statistics in Saskatoon
- homelessness, health, psycho-social impacts
- actual budgets of a single person and a family living on social assistance
- poor-bashing
- hope

Required readings:

1. Chapter 8 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Brock, R., Debunking the myths about the urban family: A constructed conversation.
2. Chapter 10 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Li, G., Social class, culture, and “good parenting”: *Voices of low SES families*.
3. Chapter 2 *black ants and buddhists*: Compassion, action, and change.

Class 11: Rethinking Practice (Wednesday, July 28th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- identifying specific practices
- interrogating them through the lenses of explicit, null, and hidden curriculum
- re-imagining/re-planning these practices

Required readings:

1. Chapter 4 *Other Kinds of Families*: Rieger, L., A welcoming tone in the classroom: Developing the potential of diverse students and their families.

2. Chapter 11 (*Mis*)*Understanding Families*: Chung, S. & Clandinin, D.J., The interwoven stories of teachers, families, and children in curriculum making.

Class 12: Seeing Families as Strength-Based (Thursday, July 29th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- Presentation by Hossiendad Alizadeh-father, educational assistant, Afghani refugee
- Hossiendad's personal story
- cultural responsiveness, working with culturally-diverse children
- parent knowledge
- funds of knowledge
- cultural knowledge
- other kinds of families

Required readings:

1. Chapter 4 *black ants and buddhists*: It takes a village to teach first grade.
2. Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., González, N. (1992.) Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31, 132–141.

Class 13: Toward a “curriculum of family” (Friday, July 30th, 9–11:50 a.m.)

- considering what is needed in teacher education (content and process) to prepare teachers to work with families and to engage in curriculum-making alongside them in classrooms

Required readings:

1. Pushor, D. (2009, May). The situation of parents in the curricular commonplaces: A place of equal rank? *LEARNing Landscapes*, 2, (2), 139–154. http://zegapi.com/view/?book_name=LearnSpring09
2. Chapter 11 *black ants and buddhists*: Building trust with families and weathering controversy.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Photovoice Project

The curriculum of photovoice is the photographic images of daily life as depicted by family members. In our context, it will involve you:

- selecting a family, different from your own, with whom to work and learn in relationship
- (I will provide you with an official letter for the family, detailing our project.)
- providing a camera for parents and perhaps other family members, so they can record images of aspects of their home and community which they deem important (I have 5 College of Education digital cameras for our cohort to use.),

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- talking with them about their photographs so they can share their knowledge, perspectives, and understandings with you,
- creating with them a form of presentation of the photovoice, which includes both images and voice (e.g. photo album with text, photo display with text, IMovie, Powerpoint, installation),
- after the process, submitting to me both your photovoice project and a written copy of your interrogation (see above), approx. 5 pages in length.

The photovoice project will provide an opportunity for you to see a family, home(s), and communities through the eyes of family members – rather than through your own eyes as an outsider looking in.

Rethinking Curriculum-Making

You will examine a recent experience of curriculum-making within your own practice, in relation to notions of family, and curriculum implicitly and explicitly being lived out within it. Such experiences could include:

- a planned unit of study, inquiry focus, theme or big idea
- your selection of children’s literature
- activities to get to know students at the beginning of a new school year
- your use of curricular resources.

In light of course readings, discussions, and activities, please interrogate this curriculum experience, attending to family structures depicted, discourses of families, un/conscious beliefs and assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and taken-for-grantedness. Then reconsider and re-imagine/re-plan the experience in a way that opens spaces for families to be viewed and positioned in ways that are complex, multiple, knowing, visible, and present. What is different in your remake of this element of your curriculum? Why did you make the changes you did?

Reading Responses

1. Family stories/stories of families
2. Explicit, null, and hidden curriculum in relation to families
3. Other kinds of families
4. A “curriculum of parents”

For each of the above four course topics, please:

- detail what you believed, felt, knew and understood about the topic before you began the readings/course
- write a five page synthesis, making direct connections to course readings, discussions, experiences, that makes explicit your growth in understanding about this topic

- how have your beliefs been
- shaped/influenced/challenged/affirmed?
- what greater knowledge/understanding/skill do you now have to translate these beliefs into practice in family and school contexts?
- what have your most significant learnings been and why?

This is intended to be an honest account of your personal and professional growth and your shifts in thinking and identity as teachers. The purpose of the responses is to give you the opportunity to examine the philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical concepts presented in the readings in relation to your contextual, practical, and personal understandings of families and schools.

DETAILS OF THE SUMMER SWEATLODGE

Prior to the Sweatlodge

Vernon Linklater, as the elder's helper, will meet with us prior to the Sweatlodge and do some teachings with us. We present to the Elder's helper something to be shared, such as a bag of apples, bananas, oranges, or some sliced cheese with crackers.

The Sweatlodge

Vernon says a short sweat takes about one and a half hours. An average sweat is two hours in length, and they can last as long as two hours and 20 minutes. One round lasts up to 20 minutes. You can come out after a round and stay out until all the rocks are back in, if you would like to get some air and cool down. You must commit for 1 round. You should do four rounds. Four rounds must be done, but they do not all have to be done in one sweat if that is not working for you.

Women cannot go into the Sweatlodge if it is their moon time (menstrual cycle). There should be no alcohol or drugs in your body for 4 days prior. You bring a towel or a blanket to sit on and another towel with which to wipe yourself. Women generally wear a loose gown, for example, a flannel nightgown. Women's legs must be covered so your gown must be full-length. Men can wear swimming trunks or shorts. They are not required to wear a shirt.

At the beginning of the sweat, the elder will ask for 5 rocks (called the grandfathers) to be put in. They represent the 4 directions and Mother Earth. Men will then go in for a pipe ceremony. Eleven rocks will be added. The women will then enter. In terms of protocol, we present the elder with tobacco and cloth, and we tell him what/whom we are praying for that evening. Water will be splashed on the rocks with an evergreen branch, a horn, or copper cups. They refer to this as splashing the grandfathers.

The cloth we present (called flags) will be red, yellow, navy blue, white, or a brightly coloured flowered design (known as the grandmother cloth). Vernon said each colour represents something. For example, yellow cloth suggests you are asking for spiritual support from the Creator/the spirits. He says, though, we can present any colour we choose.

After the Sweatlodge

After the Sweatlodge, we can change from our wet clothes into dry ones. Women will still need to be wearing a long skirt that covers your legs. We will then sit together, men on one side, women on the other, and share the food that has been contributed. The food moves around the circle and you are invited to share in it. You must take some of everything that comes around. If you have a plastic container, you can put food in there that you do not want or cannot eat at that time. You must eat it later or dispose of it in a “good way.” (We will talk about what this means.) Vernon will do more teaching before we begin. He’s a great person and a wonderful teacher. We are very welcome to be there as learners.

INTRODUCING ENGAGING PARENTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Just as parent engagement has been the central focus of my program of research throughout my academic career, I saw it as the central focus in my unfolding curriculum of parents. While the terms “parent involvement” and “parent engagement” are often used interchangeably in the literature in this field, I believe they represent two very different conceptualizations. My intention in the course *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning* was to differentiate these conceptualizations, philosophically, pedagogically, and practically.

In research with Claudia Ruitenberg and a team of co-researchers at Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, we inquired into the different ways in which parents are positioned on a school landscape. As a result of this inquiry, we distinguished the conceptualizations of parent involvement and parent engagement as follows:

Benson (1999) notes that “‘involvement’ comes from the Latin, ‘involvere,’ which means ‘to roll into’ and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system” (p. 48). Beare (1993) adds that “the implication in the word is that the person ‘involved’ is co-opted, brought into the act by another party” (p. 207, as cited in Benson, 1999, p. 48). Parents who are “involved” serve the school’s agenda by doing the things educators ask or expect them to do – volunteering at school, parenting in positive ways, and supporting and assisting their children at home with their schoolwork – while knowledge, voice and decision-making continue to rest with the educators. (Pushor, 2001)

...“Engagement,” in comparison to involvement, comes from en, meaning “make,” and gage, meaning “pledge” – to make a pledge (Harper, 2001), to make a moral commitment (Sykes, 1976, p. 343). The word engagement is further defined as “contact by fitting together, ... the meshing of gears” (Engagement). The implication is that the person ‘engaged’ is an integral and essential part of

a process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. By extension, engagement implies enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, of teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial. (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, pp. 12–13)

The central purpose of the course, *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*, was to invite students to develop a deep understanding of parent engagement and of the multiple attributes that delineate parent engagement from parent involvement. Providing students with a deliberate selection of readings and experiences, I expected that they would begin to develop a repertoire of strategies through which they could engage parents in their child's teaching and learning.

Critical to the conceptualization of parent engagement is a belief that parents hold knowledge of children, and of teaching and learning, and a belief that all parents have strengths. Because the examination of students' beliefs and assumptions about parents and families was central in *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*, the two courses worked well as complementary offerings. For those who chose to take both courses, the exploration of families in the morning class deepened and facilitated students' understandings of the significance of parent knowledge, both in regard to student learning and in regard to parent engagement.

ENGAGING PARENTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

A one-way relationship isn't much of a relationship at all. Limiting ourselves to telling families what we want or what they should do does not take advantage of the rich experiences and knowledge that every family brings with them to their children's education. Nor does it respond to what all families need and want from schools to create partnerships that effectively support children's learning.

(Graue & Hawkins, in Miller Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010, p. 123)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The term "parent engagement" represents a conceptualization of the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes as integral and essential to processes of schooling. You will learn about aspects of parent engagement which differentiate it from involvement and which create opportunities for parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to enhance your understanding of what parent engagement is – and is not, conditions which invite engagement, the complexities and multiplicity inherent within it, and possibilities within your own curriculum-making for working alongside parents in respectful, caring, and committed ways. In this course, you will:

- differentiate between communication with parents, parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent leadership,
- explore, affirm, and/or challenge your beliefs and assumptions about parents,
- consider contextual factors which invite or prevent authentic parent engagement,
- re-conceptualize yourself as a “guest host” on school/childcare landscapes,
- recognize the depth and breadth of parent engagement in out of school places,
- envision ways to connect parents with the school, connect parents with parents, and connect yourself with homes and the community,
- learn ways to utilize the unique knowledge, culture, rhythm, and context of each family in your curriculum-making and decision-making,
- explore practices which center the work of school community councils on student learning and other educational outcomes,
- realize the reciprocal benefits of parent engagement for students, parents, communities, and staff in schools,
- consider the place of schooling in the education of children.

COURSE TEXTS

Allen, J. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R. & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships* New York, NY: The New Press.

COURSE NOVELS

Please purchase, from a venue of your choosing, one of the following novels. You will participate in a book club with colleagues who make the same novel selection.

- Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. NY: Little, Brown & Company.
- Kapur, M. (2006). *Home*. India: Random House.
- Toews, M. (2008). *The flying Troutmans*. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada.

PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE

Class 1: What is “parent engagement”? (Monday, July 19th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- communication, involvement, engagement, leadership

- beliefs and assumptions about parents
- attributes of engagement

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 1 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Introduction
2. Chapter 2 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: What is a family-school partnership supposed to look like?
3. Foreword and Introduction *Creating Welcoming Schools*: pp. ix–x, 1–10.
4. Pushor, D., Ruitenberg, C., with co-researchers from Princess Alexandra Community School.
5. (2005, November). *Parent engagement and leadership*. Research report, project #134, Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, Saskatoon, SK, 79pp. http://www.mcdowellfoundation.ca/main_mcdowell/projects/research_rep/134_parent_engagement.pdf. Please read pp. 1–34.

Optional Reading: On Reserve:

- Lopez, G.R. & Stoelting. (2010). Disarticulating parent involvement in Latino-impacted schools in the Midwest. In M. Miller Marsh & T. Turner-Vorbeck (Eds), *(Mis)understanding families: Learning from real families in our schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, pp. 19–36.

Class 2: Educators as “guest hosts” (Tuesday, July 20th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- principles of parent/community engagement
- what does it mean to be a guest in a school community?
- what does it mean to be a host in a school community?
- Carole Courtney, SWITCH coordinator, 3 – 4 pm. An introduction to SWITCH
- Health disparities in Saskatoon

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 1 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Exploring memories of school.
2. Chapter 3 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Ready, Set, Go!
3. Pushor, D. (2007, Fall). Welcoming parents: Educators as guest hosts on school landscapes. *Education Canada*, 47, (4), 6–11.
4. Saskatchewan Learning. (2004). Building communities of hope: Effective practices for meeting the diverse learning needs of children and youth. Community schools policy and conceptual framework. Regina, SK: Author. <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/building-communities-of-hope>.
5. Please read Section III Policy, Vision, Goals, Principles, and Effective Practices, pp. 8–12.
6. Please peruse the Student Wellness Initiative Toward Community Health (SWITCH) website: www.switch.usask.ca
7. Lemstra, M. & Neudorf, C. (2007). *Health disparity in Saskatoon: Analysis to intervention*. Saskatoon Health Region, Saskatoon, SK. <http://www.uphn.ca/doc/public/HealthDisparitiesinSaskatoonExecutiveSummary.pdf>

Class 3: Living as a guest (Wednesday, July 21st, 1–3:50 p.m.)

Meet at King Edward School at 1 pm. 721 Avenue K South

- participation in a core community walk led by Lori Pulai, Community School Coordinator
- reflecting on what was learned and the implications of the learning
- exploring the Reggio Emilia project, *Reggio Tutta: A guide to the city by the children*
- generating other ways to be a guest in a school community

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 2 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Writing cultural memoirs.
2. Chapter 4 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Developing photography and other avenues to learning with families.

Class 4: SWITCH/Book Club (Wednesday, July 21st)

- Half the class will work an evening shift at SWITCH and debrief (This group will be located at the SWITCH Clinic from 5–9 pm)
- What do we learn about parents/families/communities when we go off the school landscape?
- How might we use what we learn?
- How will this redefine our work in relation with parents, families and children?
- Half the class will begin their book club(s) (Room 2001 or a location of the book club's choice, 7–9 p.m.)
- Notions of schooling, the role of teachers, the role of parents, parent engagement, home/school relations will be examined in the context of a particular work of fiction.
- Please have read approximately half of your novel by this date.

Class 5: Home Visits (Thursday, July 22nd, 1–3:50 p.m.)

Guest Presenter Lauren Sawatsky, Community School Coordinator

- purposes and possible approaches
- relationship-building and reciprocity
- procedural and safety considerations
- dis/positioning and teacher identity

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 3 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Learning with and from families.
2. Pushor, D. & Murphy, B. (2004, Fall). Parent marginalization, marginalized parents: Creating a place for parents on the school landscape. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 50(3), 221–235.

Class 6: Living as a host (Friday, July 23rd, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- welcoming and hospitality
- trust and relationships
- practices of possibility

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 4 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Developing relationships.
2. Pushor, D., Ruitenberg, C., with co-researchers from Princess Alexandra Community School. (2005, November). *Parent engagement and leadership*. Research report, project #134, Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, Saskatoon, SK, 79 pp. http://www.mcdowellfoundation.ca/main_mcdowell/projects/research_rep/134_parent_engagement.pdf. Please read pp. 35–69.

Class 7: Connecting parents with parents (Monday, July 26th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- making space in schools for parents
- creating webs of support and relationship
- considering the strength of numbers

Required Reading:

1. Brown, J. (2010, Winter). Parents building communities in schools. *Voices in Urban Education*, 26, 45–53. <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/wp-content/pdf/VUE26.pdf>

Class 8: SWITCH/Book Club (Monday, July 26th – Evening)

- reversed roles to Class 4

Class 9: Rethinking Practice (Tuesday, July 27th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- “ask them” what they want/need/hope for
- plan together
- re-imagine such taken-for-granted school events such as Meet the Teacher Night, K Orientation, Parent Nights, Family Fridays considering the concept of authentic engagement

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 5 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Engaging in genuine dialogue.
2. Chapter 6 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Inviting dialogue at the conference table.
3. Chapter 7 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Creating dialogue throughout the year.
4. Pushor, D. (2010). Are school doing enough to learn about families? In M. Miller Marsh & T. Turner-Vorbeck (Eds), *(Mis)understanding families: Learning from real families in our schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, pp. 4–16.

Class 10: School Community Councils (Wednesday, July 28th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

Co-Facilitator Donnalee Weinmaster, Superintendent, Saskatoon Public Schools

- legislation, intentions, mandate
- parent engagement in the analysis of student achievement results
- parent engagement in the development of continuous improvement plans
- processes and considerations

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 8 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Sharing power.
2. School Community Councils: *A Handbook for School Community Councils and Principals*. Please read Section 1.2 Purpose and Vision, pp. 3–6. <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=281,144,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1953&Filename=PrincipalsHandbook.pdf>

Class 11: Book Club Exchanges/Parent Engagement in Teaching and Learning
(Thursday, July 29th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- learning from the research
- using parent knowledge
- maintaining parents’ positioning as parents
- honoring parents’ engagement in out of school places
- side by side planning

Required Readings:

1. Chapter 5 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Linking to learning.
2. Chapter 6 *Beyond the Bake Sale*: Addressing differences.
3. Chapter 8 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Engaging families.
4. Chapter 9 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Engaging families in classroom projects.
5. Chapter 10 *Creating Welcoming Schools*: Collaborating for a more just society.
6. On Reserve: Pushor, D. (2010, April). “Parent engagement in mathematics is just not possible.” Or is it? *Vinculum: Journal of the Saskatchewan Mathematics Teachers’ Society*, 2(1), 20–32

Class 12: Rethinking Practice – Moving to Action (Friday, July 30th, 1–3:50 p.m.)

- class time to work, individually and collaboratively, on your “rethinking practice” assignment
- determine what practice you wish to interrogate
- attend to the beliefs and assumptions which underlie it, the positioning of parents within it, who plans it, establishes the agenda, facilitates it, and what the outcome(s) of the event are
- together with colleagues, begin to reconsider and re-imagine/re-plan the event in a way that opens spaces for parents to be authentically engaged and positioned with educators in side by side ways

Class 13: Parent Engagement in Teaching and Learning/Potluck Lunch with Parent/Teacher Conversation Groups (Saturday, July 31st 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.)

- exchanging synthesized notions related to parents and parent engagement which arose in your book club conversations
- a reciprocal exchange of stories, thoughts, feelings and ideas with parents, in relation over lunch.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Book Club Reflections

The purpose of the book club is to encourage you to extend theoretical/conceptual ideas around parents and schools through the use of fiction. How can the characters, actions, ideas enable you to re-imagine or re-conceptualize how parents and teachers engage with one another and within schools/childcare centers? How do the messages and the underlying theme(s) of the novel offer something to the topic of parent engagement? By using fiction in an academic setting, possibilities are created for you to see the familiarity and taken-for-grantedness of the landscape of schools/childcare centers in new and different ways.

Class time will be allotted for book clubs to get together to discuss their latest reading in the novel, and relate it to ideas discussed in class regarding the engagement of parents in education. The book club will generate two assignments:

(a) Midpoint Reflection

This is an individually written reflection. You are asked to reflect on and connect the novel's content with concepts and/or theories discussed in the course. This could be written in prose (maximum 5 pages) or in another creative format.

(b) Final Book Club Reflection and Presentation

In the final class, book clubs will present a collective reflection on the novel which links it to practices, issues, or compelling questions regarding the engagement of parents in childcare, schooling, and education. In this oral presentation, book clubs will provide an overview of the novel, but focus primarily on linking the course content, characters, etc. of the novel to parents, childcare, schooling, and education. This assignment is designed with a high degree of flexibility, and book clubs are encouraged to be creative and innovative with how the novel is presented and related to the course. The purpose of the presentation is to generate rich discussions about how popular literature can spark ideas and inform our thinking in our academic and professional lives.

Rethinking Practice

You will examine a typical practice in your current school or childcare context in which parents and teachers/childcare providers interact. Such practices could include:

- Meet the Teacher Night
- Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten orientation
- Family Fridays
- Open house, parent meeting, curriculum night
- Parent/Teacher conferences.

In light of course readings, discussions, and activities, you will interrogate this practice, attending to the beliefs and assumptions which underlie it, the positioning

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of parents within it, who plans it, establishes the agenda, facilitates it, and what the outcome(s) of the event are. You will then reconsider and re-imagine/re-plan the event in a way that opens spaces for parents to be authentically engaged and positioned with educators in side by side ways. You will submit a paper which outlines the practice as it currently exists, describes the new practice as you have redesigned it, explains why you made the choices you did and what new outcomes you believe will be realized through your redesign.

Reading Responses (As detailed in Re/Presenting Families in Schools)

- Beliefs and assumptions about parents
- Being a guest host on a school landscape
- Parent engagement in out of school places
- Parent engagement in teaching and learning

MOVING FROM PLANNING TO LIVING A CURRICULUM OF PARENTS

The two weeks of classes, the sometimes 12 hour days, the pace of the schedule, and being with the same group of people in the same environment for extended periods was at one and the same time intense and exhausting and freeing and rejuvenating. After just a few days, we began to joke with one another about being in “summer camp.” While we did go home to sleep at night, we ate all of our meals together many days. Everyone contributed snacks throughout the two week period, and we had a table with coffee, tea, and food available to everyone all of the time.



As the courses unfolded, the walls of our classroom became covered with charts and materials created in group work and through shared activities. The room filled with teaching materials and equipment, people's personal belongings and family artifacts, displays of children's books, and props for book club presentations.

In this time and space, and I believe prompted by the intensity of the experience, bonds grew quickly and strongly between and among the members of the classes and with me. It created the possibility for open sharing and honest dialogue that I have not seen develop as deeply or immediately in courses which I have taught once per week over an extended period. It was in the living of the curriculum, in the intertwining of our lives and stories that I came to understand, in new and more thoughtful ways, the essential nature of some aspects of the planned curriculum of parents.



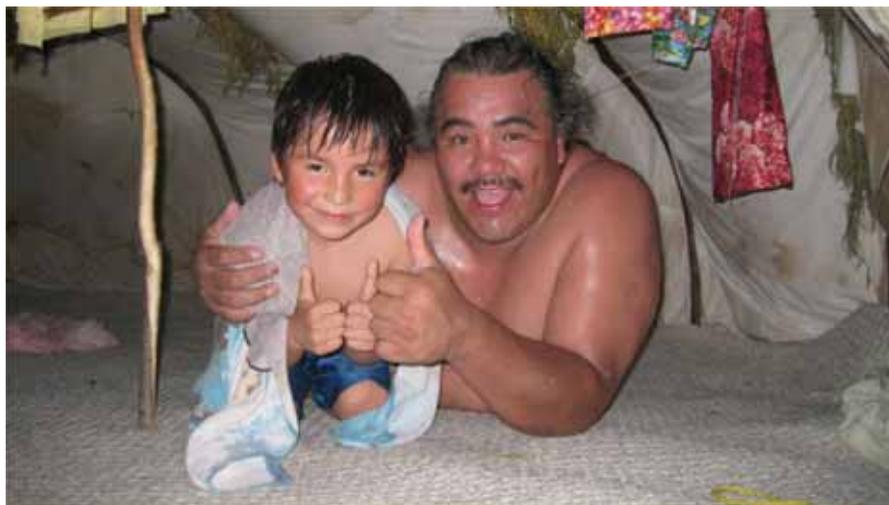
Sustained Teaching and Learning

I believe that the “summer camp” experience the courses offered, with the students’ sustained engagement with the central ideas foregrounded in the courses, was key to the impact the curriculum of parents had on the students’ beliefs and assumptions and on their knowledge and understanding. Because there was little time for anything else to take them away from their immersion in these ideas, the students remained thinking about, troubling, processing, and working with these notions until they were deeply internalized, no longer ideas that sat outside of them but ideas that had become a part of their fabric as teachers and early childhood educators.

One way in which this was evident was in the common language and vocabulary that everyone took up and began to use. When students began to write their reading responses, they expressed how difficult it was to include citations in their writing. Because talking about “hegemonic notions of family” or “living as a guest host on a school landscape,” as examples, had become commonplace and a part of their teacher talk, they soon forgot that concepts such as these had come from a particular author and reading.

Experiencing Theory

In reflecting upon this first offering of these summer courses, I see how essential it was that I provided the students with opportunities to gain new or refined theoretical understandings by situating course readings and class presentations alongside an array of lived experiences. Taking up Dewey’s (1938) notion that experience has “educational potentialities” (p. 22), I planned for students, as one example, to read about what it means to be a “guest host” (Pushor, 2007), and then to experience being a guest at a First Nations Sweatlodge or on a community walk led by a resident of the community, and also to experience the role of a host as they made and served soup and sandwiches in a core community health clinic or arranged a potluck for parents and families.



I believe it is one kind of learning to read about and intellectualize a concept. I believe it is a different kind of learning to experience that concept in an affective and/or embodied way. I have long thought that before an individual can learn something new, s/he must first feel a need or desire for that learning. As teachers then, when we

touch someone's heart with an experience, we create an openness in that person's mind for new learning. I planned the curriculum of the courses, situating theory and experience alongside one another, in a way that I hoped would use the ideas to invite an affective, embodied, and intellectual engagement.

Student responses on the anonymous course evaluations, completed online during the final days of the courses, affirmed that the nature of the learning was more than intellectual. One student wrote, "The opportunities given during this course (e.g. Sweatlodge experience) will not soon be forgotten and I thank you for this life-altering opportunity." Expressing a shift in understanding and attitudes, another student commented, "A life-changing experience, this is a class that will influence my teachings and perspectives towards families and family dynamics." A thank you for the experiences was extended by another student, "Thank you for providing insightful real life opportunities for learning." In attesting to "the organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 25), Dewey noted that as curriculum makers it is important that we thoughtfully create "the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p. 28). The students' comments, I believe, reflect how our course experiences live on fruitfully in their lives and in their teaching.



Learning with Parents and Families

Just as I wanted to embed within both courses a range of educative experiences, I planned to create particular experiences which brought the students together with parents and families in the learning. Believing in the "parent knowledge" (Pushor, 2001, 2012) and "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) that exist within every school or early learning community, I wanted students to have the opportunity to learn about parents and families *from and with* parents and families. To this end, I invited First Nations elders to come and share with us their worldview of children and families. I asked a new Canadian parent and educational assistant, who was a former Afghani refugee, to share his story and his hopes and dreams for his children in their new homeland. I asked the past president of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition to share her story as a parent who raised her children in a context of poverty. I planned a family photovoice project as one of the course assignments. In each of these instances, the students and I learned from and with the powerful knowledge and insights of these generous individuals. As Bateson (1994) so eloquently stated:

Insight, I believe, refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another. (p. 14)

It is typical in schools, in teacher professional development, and often in courses in undergraduate and graduate teacher education, for teachers to learn about parents in distanced ways: through textbooks and articles, from the “stories of parents” shared by colleagues, and in presentations led by instructors and professional development facilitators. Instead, I believe that teacher-learning about parents and families is greatest when parents are invited to tell their own stories. In sitting side by side with parents and in speaking to one another, I do feel our understanding deepened in ways that would not have been possible through any other means.



In her reading response focused on “Beliefs and Assumptions about Parents,” Raylene Taylor, a student in *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*, wrote a poem to express who she was and how she changed as a result of the opportunity in the class to learn more about herself through her experiences with parents and families. Excerpts from her poem read:

How will you learn about this child? What invitation will you extend?
You will need help.
To whom will you go?
Will they honour you? Will you honour them?
How does understanding each one
celebrating each life
Impact each child?

His or her family?
You?

I care about children.
I care about families.
I care about making a difference.
I can't do it alone but
I can do it with you,
child and family,
together.

(Taylor, Reading Response, August, 2010)

In Raylene's poem, we see the deep understanding she developed about knowing, respecting, and honouring each family, going to them as a learner, and believing in the strength and possibility that exists in working together. We see how her experience of being side by side with parents has repositioned her. She speaks of herself now as not alone, but as being *in relationship* with parents and families.

Investing Personally

As Raylene helps us to see, the most significant learning that happened for students in the courses was not as much about parents and families as it was about themselves. From earlier research at Princess Alexandra Community School, I had come to know that the starting place is a personal one, for teachers to "first move inward – to look at themselves and at their beliefs and assumptions – before looking outward at parents and community" (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 29). At the end of the first class in *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*, I read aloud the poignant children's story *The Memory Box* (Bahr, 1991) in which grandparents, together with their grandson, put together a collection of special items to capture precious family memories that they want to preserve for the grandfather, who is suffering from Alzheimer's. I then shared a basket of my own family artifacts, using them to tell some of my family stories. In this sharing, I told stories of joyous, celebratory, and funny moments in my family. I also told stories of some very difficult and painful moments. I chose to be honest and vulnerable, to risk opening myself up to a group of individuals, many of whom I barely knew. I then asked the teachers to bring artifacts of their own for sharing in small groups the next day. I, too, wanted them to tell their family stories and, while what they chose to tell was completely their choice, I hoped that they, too, would risk telling more than their smooth family stories.

As I moved among the small groups the following day, listening in as individuals shared their artifacts and the family stories the artifacts evoked, I was struck by the level of emotion within the room. As some individuals took a risk and shared vulnerable stories, it invited others to do the same. Individuals laughed and cried, they gave each other hugs or reached out and squeezed someone else's hand, they

offered Kleenex and words of understanding, they acknowledged experiences that were very much like their own. In debriefing this experience, teachers expressed how hearing the family stories made it very clear that there was no such thing as a hegemonic family, that it was an ideal that invited judgment rather than understanding. In sharing their own stories, they saw how the story they told of their family was different – more complex and multifaceted – than the story someone who did not know them might tell of their family. In being vulnerable themselves, they developed an embodied sense of the vulnerability that parents and families must feel when they bring their children to our schools and childcare centers. They *felt* the impact such judgment could have and what harm it could do. In this moment, they were able to consider the person they wanted to be alongside parents and they were open to consciously examine their beliefs and assumptions about parents and families, affirming some, discarding others, and forming new ones. In this early experience, as in many other of our course experiences, I believe it was important to bring the learning close, to have it resonate, and to open everyone up to one another and to the thoughtful interrogation of their beliefs, their knowledge, and their practices.

Learning Along the Way

In planning these two courses, as essential aspects of a curriculum of parents, I worked alone, drawing on the research I had done, my readings in the field, my experiences as a mother, a teacher, and a teacher educator. In facilitating the two courses, in contrast, I lived them with 18 or 20 others, each with an experienced history, intentions in present time, and hopes for their imagined futures. As everyone shared their teacher stories and their family stories, the curriculum necessarily became malleable, just as steel or glass do in the presence of heat. While in the syllabi, the curriculum appeared set, determined, firm, it was a structure that moved and shifted in the presence of multiple lives. Bateson (1994) wrote about such movement and shifting as improvisation:

Improvisation and new learning are not private processes; they are shared with others at every age. The multiple layers of attention involved cannot safely be brushed aside or subordinated to the completion of tasks. We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way, so it is important to attend and respond. (pp. 9–10)

Bateson's words invite me to return to Schwab's (1973) conceptualization of curriculum; a conceptualization in which the four commonplaces of learners, teachers, subject matter, and milieus are ones of equal coordination, with no one commonplace subordinated to any other. A lived curriculum, one in which learners and teachers come together in relationship with one another and with subject matter, attentive to the personal and professional milieus in which each resides, is necessarily a curriculum of improvisation.

As some of the students in our courses were First Nations or had extensive experience working alongside First Nations families, they responded to and took a role in experiences such as our conversation with the First Nations elders, our participation in a Sweatlodge, and our community walk in a core neighbourhood in different ways than other students. While some students found the Sweatlodge a very spiritual and life-changing experience, others were too overwhelmed by their feelings or emotions to participate, and others experienced it as commonplace. While the community walk was an experience noted by some students as the one that most deeply touched them and influenced their learning, other students felt that in walking through a neighbourhood as a large group, albeit alongside a community member, we were positioning the members of that community as spectacles and ourselves as tourists. As Bateson stated, our learning was not private. With each experience, we talked together about our responses, feelings, and learning. We listened hard and attended carefully to one another. I was called to improvise, sometimes for one individual, sometimes for all. I was called to shift and change details of experiences, assignments, readings, or teaching and learning processes because of what I was learning from and with them, and from what they were demonstrating they knew or what they were asking to know more about. I was called to learn the steps of the dance along the way.

As I noted earlier, this “summer camp” experience was intense and exhausting and, at the same time, freeing and rejuvenating. The multiple layers of attention that were required each day, in relation to the details and organization of the day’s plan and in relation to staying awake to how students were feeling, responding, and making sense of the subject matter and experiences, took time and energy. Simultaneously, the rich conversations, the moments of connection, the sharing of stories, and the humility with which each person engaged in the curriculum of parents, was filled with hope and possibility. Seeing shifts occur in beliefs and assumptions, hearing of newly imagined ways of working with parents, being presented with plans for representing and honouring the diversity which exists within families, I truly did find myself catching my breath, feeling like I was breathing some new kind of air, counting this first summer offering of *Re/Presenting Families in Schools* and *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning* a celebration, something worthy of note, something that I planned to remember for the rest of my life.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICUM IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

My intention with the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement* course, which followed in the fall term, was to provide an impetus for students to translate their learning about representations of family and the engagement of parents in teaching and learning into their lived practice within their school or child care settings. I believed a practicum would give students the opportunity to plan and enact new practices in a structure which provided them with support and encouragement for their risk-taking. I decided upon three forms through which to offer teaching and

learning experiences: together through whole group classes, in small groups through students' participation in Support Circles, and individually through my one on one time with each student in their classroom, school, child care centre, or postsecondary institution. For each of these structures, we co-planned what our focus would be, and when and how we would realize it, based on the learning outcomes the students identified, individually and/or collectively. My intention was that these structures would offer students a variety of ways to deepen and sustain their engagement with ideas as they worked with them in particular and contextual ways.

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT:
PRACTICUM IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

We acknowledge that the work involved in building meaningful, productive relationships with parents is sensitive, difficult, and time-consuming, especially when the diversity among families creates divergent desires and needs. Yet we agree ... that the result is worth the work

(Graue & Hawkins, in Miller Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010, pp. 123–124)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed for students to become engaged both individually and collectively in exploring major issues relating to educational research and curriculum development. In this section of ECUR 805, you will have the opportunity to pursue personal interests related to *the engagement of parents and families* in curriculum and curriculum making in schools/childcare centres, in ways that are relevant to you as a professional in the field of education/early learning and childcare. This course will encourage you to see yourself as a catalyst of change and growth within the field.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As our shared focus is exploring educational research and development regarding parent and family engagement, in this course you will:

- deepen and extend your understanding of educational research about families and the influence discourses and representations of family have on curriculum-making in schools,
- enact curricular practices which you have rethought and remade in light of your deepened understanding,
- deepen and extend your understanding of educational research about engaging parents and family members in processes of teaching and learning in your classroom/childcare/school context,

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- reflect upon the complexities and multiplicity inherent in processes of engagement, shifting and changing your practices responsively as you work to apply research to your practice,
- learn ways as an educator/childcare provider to step out of the school/child care centre into the community,
- work alongside parents and family members in respectful, caring, and committed ways.

COURSE TEXTS

We will revisit and explore in greater depth readings from *Re/Presenting Families in Schools* and *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning*, based on individual and/or collective determinations. We will select additional readings, as your learning needs and interests direct.

PROPOSED CLASS FORMAT

Class 1: Saturday, September 25th 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

- Sharing Circle: Each member of the class will:
 - (a) give an overview of the practices which you have implemented since school opening to engage parents and family members in teaching and learning in the classroom/childcare centre or school or,
 - (b) highlight one specific event or practice you have newly developed and tried, and share it in greater detail.
- Map Shared Points of Interest/Inquiry
- Establish Support Circles

In Support Circles of 3 or 4 members, you will establish learning plans for the term:

- What outcome(s) do you want to accomplish, individually and collectively?
- What do you need to do to support your own learning and the learning of others in your support circle in order to realize your outcomes?
- When, where, how will you do it?

Support Circle Sharing

- Your Support Circle will share your plans with the whole group.
- Create an Emergent Curriculum for October 23rd and November 27th, based on common learning interests
- Create Debbie's Visitation Schedule to School and Childcare Sites
- Review/Make Collaborative Decisions about Course Assignments

Class 2: Saturday, October 23rd 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Emergent Curriculum –TBD by the class

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Class 3: Saturday, November 27th 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Emergent Curriculum – TBD by the class

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement

The practicum in parent and family engagement is your opportunity to implement, with support, new or refined practices which you have designed to meaningfully engage parents and/or family members in the curriculum and or curriculum making of your classroom/childcare centre/school. It will involve you:

1. implementing a newly designed practice in your teaching and learning context,
2. keeping a reflective journal of your experience and learning
3. Implementation: What did you do? Keep a record of dates, times, processes, and so on. Please include artifacts such as photographs, newsletters, and communications with parents to further detail your practicum experience.
4. Reflection on Practice: What are your thoughts and observations about what you did? What worked? What didn't? What will you do differently next time, and why? Note the significant details, particularities, and "aha" moments.
5. Linking to Educational Research: What did you learn? What do you now know in deeper, clearer, more experiential ways? Link your learning to theories/concepts from the research literature.

Seeking Multiple Perspectives

You will invite three individuals who were engaged in some way in the implementation of your new or refined practices of parent and family engagement to individually share their thoughts and reflections with you:

- a parent or family member
- a site-based colleague or administrator
- a colleague from your Support Circle.

You can meet with each individual in person, or through technology such as email, Skype, or a teleconference, if distance is a factor. You will include a summary of their perspectives in your reflective journal. Please place it following your reflections on your practice, and take these multiple perspectives into consideration as you link your learning to educational research in this field.

A Narrative of Practice

Using a narrative, first person style of writing, such as Mary Cowhey uses in *black ants and buddhists* (2006), you will write a story of your experience of planning and implementing a new or refined practice to more meaningfully engage parents and family members in curriculum and curriculum making in their child's classroom/

childcare centre/school. You will write about what you planned and why, how the implementation unfolded, and what knowledge, understanding, skills, beliefs you have developed or deepened as a result of this experience (with some reference to research literature in the field).

PUTTING THE LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

During the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement*, I travelled to many regions of the province as I visited students. I was a guest at a family potluck in a daycare and a visitor at their parent cooperative board meeting. I participated alongside parents in a Pre-Kindergarten fieldtrip and I took part in a wonderful array of Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Parent and Family Evenings. I conversed with a school board trustee, I joined a class led by early childhood education students, and I joined with parents in a smudging¹ ceremony at a community school. I spent time observing, participating, and talking with children, parents, and teachers in many classrooms. I engaged in deep conversations with the graduate students about their practice – their successes, their challenges, their wonders. With each and every visit, I came away with new thoughts and ideas about representing families and engaging parents in teaching and learning that captured my imagination. I found I carried with me difficult questions that I continued to puzzle over for days. Always, I gained a deeper appreciation for the complexity of this work as it is lived out in the context of real lives and circumstances.

An observation that was reinforced for me repeatedly in the practicum visits is that context matters. How does a rural school board trustee's understanding of the place and voice of parents in schools impact how a vice principal may work with teachers to shift their practices of parent engagement? How does a social hierarchy among parents, one that is lived out in venues such as hockey arenas and community-run activities, influence a teacher's ability to create a web of relationships among the parents of her students? How do a teacher's consciously held beliefs and practices withstand the challenge of staff members who have not had the same opportunity to take part in a rethinking of parent engagement practices? How does an instructor in a shared program lead the development of new practices and procedures in light of new understandings? In each location, the landscape of the child care centre, the school, or the postsecondary institution is much more than a physical landscape; it is a landscape with a "sense of expansiveness," "filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4). It is in the complex intertwining of these many facets of a particular landscape – all with a history, a present, and an imagined future – that the students translated their beliefs and knowledge into specific practices and lived them out.

A powerful message that I take away from my experience with the *Practicum in Parent and Family Engagement* is that there is no such thing as best practices. It always

depends. The opportunity for me to experience the context of each student's reality was so important to my ability to stand alongside in support and to contribute meaningfully to the implementation efforts. The collaboration between the members of the Support Circles mattered in just as significant a way. Depending on their geographic proximity to one another, students visited each other's classrooms, called one other, texted, emailed, met for breakfast, and/or Skyped with one another. As a support circle, they were able to tell stories of their unfolding practices, get response in the moment, and move forward with refreshed insights or confidence. Because they shared experiences, readings, and common language from the summer courses, they were able to stand alongside one another differently than other individuals in their lives could. With this support and the trust from others, it was possible, that all individuals represented families in their programs and engaged with parents in teaching and learning in ways that were contextually responsive and successful for them.

MOVING FORWARD

As students began to share their stories of experience with one another in our whole group classes, and as they began to write about shifts and changes in their beliefs and assumptions and how these shifts were influencing their practice, I proposed to them that we turn their "narratives of practice" into book chapters. What follows, then, are the teachers' stories, capturing their experiences immersed in a curriculum of parents. In honest and vulnerable ways, they tell of what they took up, how it shaped their knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and how they lived it out as they returned to their classrooms, schools, and child care centres. They make visible the impact living a curriculum of parents has had on who they are in relation to parents and families. I invite you to read their stories of experience, thinking all the while of your own context, your own complexities. Who are you alongside parents and families? What do you do? Why do you do it? And are there ways it might be different?

NOTE

- ¹ A Smudging Ceremony is performed by Aboriginal people to cleanse mind, body, and spirit, by lighting sacred plants such as sage or sweet grass, and using the smoke as a cleanse. It is believed that a participant's prayers will rise in the smoke to the Creator.

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