Home-school partnerships from the perspectives of mothers and pre-service teachers

participating in a parent-teacher communication course

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Abstract

Correlational studies have consistently shown a significant, positive relationship between parental engagement in school and academic achievement. The literature further evidenced the important role of parent-teacher communication in promoting parental engagement. However, most Canadian universities do not offer undergraduate pre-service teacher education courses focusing on parents.

This qualitative study investigated the impact of continuous, weekly interactions between parents and pre-service teachers, within the context of a parental communication course for pre-service teachers. Focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires were used to track the evolution of parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher partnerships.

By the end of the course, pre-service teachers had gained a deeper understanding of the importance of parent-teacher partnerships, as evidenced by their ability to engage in self-reflection and problem-solving when discussing and interacting with parents. Moreover, the parents in this course gained knowledge about the educational system and felt empowered to play an active role in their children's education.

Overall, the findings showed that the parental communication course for pre-service teachers had a positive impact on both pre-service teachers' and parents' understanding of parent-teacher partnerships. Educating pre-service teachers about the importance of the parental-teacher partnership can promote increased engagement opportunities for parents in schools. This study provides evidence for the importance of including parental communication courses in all Canadian teacher education programs.

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Parental engagement in school has been a topic of interest in education for the past two decades. Correlational studies have consistently shown a significant, positive relationship between parental engagement and the academic achievement of diverse students in elementary, middle, and secondary school (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Fan & Chen, 2001). Children, whose parents engage with their school more frequently, are more likely to attend school regularly, to do well in school, to graduate from high-school, to pursue a career or higher education, and to behave well in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lagace-Seguin& Case, 2010; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; Walker et al., 2005). Overall, higher levels of parental engagement have been linked to higher student achievement and higher levels of psychological processes that support student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lagace-Seguin,& Case, 2010; Walker et al., 2005).

In addition to the association with positive student outcomes, parental engagement has also been linked to benefits for teachers and parents. As such, teachers reported that their tasks were facilitated by parental engagement and that parental input was helpful in addressing the behavioural problems encountered in their classrooms (Gestwicki, 2013; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Also, parents who engaged in their children's school frequently had more knowledge of what happened in school, participated more in decision-making, and participated more in workshops provided by the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Student, families, and teachers alike can benefit from parental engagement.

Gaps in Literature

Despite the multitude of studies researching the topic of parental engagement, there are still major inconsistencies and gaps in the existing literature.

Correlational evidence. Parental engagement has been mostly studied using correlational designs. To my knowledge, there are currently no experimental studies on the effects of parental engagement in school. Therefore, in spite of the numerous associations uncovered, the impact of parental engagement on children's learning is still unknown. Our limited understanding of the effects of parental engagement is highlighted by research results linking parental engagement to negative outcomes. In Levine-Rasky's study (2009) of the dynamics of parental engagement in a multicultural school, high levels of parental engagement created a culture of discrimination and exclusion. The powerful engagement of several mothers led to the formation of cliques that impeded the engagement of mothers from different backgrounds. Consequently, teachers' preferential behaviours and the school's policies benefited the children of the mothers in the dominant and highly engaged clique, disadvantaging the majority of students. This study stands as an example of how parental engagement can interfere with democracy within schools. Maybe more importantly, Levine-Rasky's study (2009) demonstrated that the impact of parental engagement on children, parents and teachers is not always positive and is still ill understood.

Variation in definitions. The concept of parental engagement has been described and operationalized differently by researchers. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) were the first to create a model of the factors influencing parents' engagement in their children's education, in an attempt to define the concept. Despite researchers' efforts to operationalize the process of parental engagement, there is still a lack of consistency with regard to its definition (Evans,

2013). A divide seems to have occurred between researchers who, following into the footsteps of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, employ the term "involvement" and researchers who prefer the term "engagement". According to Halgunseth et al. (2009), parental involvement models (i.e. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model) focus primarily on parent's beliefs, behaviours and deficiencies, whereas parental engagement models (i.e. Epstein's model) focus equally on parents' and schools' actions and call for families and teachers to work together as partners.

Theoretical Frameworks

    Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's original model (1995) has five levels. The first level consists of four psychological contributors to parents' decisions to become engaged in their children's school: (1) parent's role construction (i.e. parental beliefs), (2) sense of efficacy for helping the child, (3) general school invitations for parental engagement and (4) general child invitations for engagement (i.e. child asks parents for help with homework). The second level of their model identifies contextual factors (i.e. time, energy) that may influence the form of parents' engagement. The third level describes how parents may affect children's school outcomes, while the fourth level stipulates that for the outcomes of parental engagement to be positive, parent's engagement form has to match the child's developmental needs and the school's expectations for engagement. The fifth level of the model consists of potential student outcomes resulting from parental engagement (i.e. skills and knowledge, school success, self-efficacy). The first two levels of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model have been revised by Walker et al. (2005). The first level of the revised model describes parents' home- and school-based behaviours, whereas the second level describes parents' involvement forms (Walker et al., 2005). The revised first level identifies three major sources of parental motivation for involvement: (1) parental motivational beliefs, (2) parental

perceptions of invitations for involvement, and (3) parental perceived life context. Parental

motivational beliefs consist of parents' beliefs about their role in their children's education and

of parents' belief whether they can produce desired outcomes for their children's education.

Parental perceptions of invitations for involvement can consist of perceived invitations from the

school, the teachers, or the child. Parental perceived life context consists of parental perceptions

of their skills and knowledge and of perceptions of other demands on their time and energy.

Together, the original and the revised model offer a comprehensive account of parent's

motivational sources for engagement and of the potential effects of parental engagement. The

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler models focus on parents' perceptions, beliefs and actions,

however the context in which parental engagement takes place is also important because the

school may not always be responsive to parents' intentions and expectations.

Epstein's model. Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model (1987) complements

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model by offering a holistic view of home-school partnerships

(Deslandes, 2001). According to Epstein, when parents, teachers, and students work together as

partners in education, a caring community is developed around children (Epstein, 2001).

Epstein's model (1987) posits that there are three spheres of influence, or contexts, that directly

affect student learning and development: the family, the school, and the community. The student

is located at the center of these three spheres, signifying that the student is the main actor of their

education and development. The three major contexts in which students learn and grow can be

drawn together, or pushed apart, by the joint or separate practices of schools, families, and

communities. The overlapping spheres of influence model takes into account the complexity of

the interactions that occur between schools, families, and communities at both the institutional

and individual levels. Epstein's model (1987) thus offers a global understanding of parental

engagement and home-school interaction. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Epstein developed a framework (1997) of six types of parental engagement. This framework, which is based on research findings and teachers' experience, informs schools of the elements to be addressed for a successful home-school-community partnership to form. The six types of parental engagement are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 1997). In order for a home-school-community partnership program to be successful, the school should facilitate these six types of parental engagement and should provide opportunities for parents to be engaged (Epstein, 2001). A vision of partnership between schools and families is reinforced in Quebec schools. As such, Quebec's Education Act enables parents to be partners in school management through participation in the school council (Deslandes, 2001). Moreover, the guidelines for teacher education published by Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur consider teacher's ability to cooperate with parents a mandatory professional competency (Martinet, Raymond, & Gauthhier, 2001). It is thus essential to understand how home-school-community partnerships work in order to foster them.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994) also contributes in significant ways to our understanding of the process of parental engagement. Bronfenbrenner's model stipulates that every individual exists within a multitude of systems, or environments, which interact with each other and influence each other: the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. This ecological model prompts researchers to recognize that schools are only one of the multiple contexts in which children exist, learn and develop. Children spend most of their time with their families and in their communities, not in school. Therefore, in order to optimize

the learning that happens in school, it is important for teachers to consider their students' other learning contexts.

The conceptual frameworks presented above inform us of multiple aspects of parental engagement. Hoover-Dempsey's model focuses on the process of parental engagement and its motivational factors. Epstein's model describes the interactions between the actors involved in the learning process. Bronfenbrenner's model emphasizes the interactions between the multiple contexts in which learning occurs. However, these frameworks are not exhaustive. In order to have an in-depth understanding of parental engagement, one needs to take a closer look at the nature and functioning of home-school partnerships.

Home-school Partnerships

Parental engagement and home-school partnerships are highly interrelated. Indeed, Halgunseth et al. (2009) argued that for parental engagement to occur, there must be an on-going, reciprocal strength-based partnership between families and schools. However, teacher practices in Canadian schools have a narrow focus on academic achievement, and thus frequently diminish the role of families and communities in children's education and development (Pushor, 2009). It may be constructive to appeal to parents' expertise when making decisions related to their children's education. In fact, Schwab (1973) posited that a successful educational curriculum consists of four commonplaces of equal rank: students, teachers, subject matter, and milieus (i.e. family, community, cultural values, etc.). Thus, given that Canadian schools tend to neglect milieus in their educational curriculum, one can argue that including families and communities in the school curriculum may enrich children's learning experiences.

When milieus are not systematically included in the curriculum, the knowledge, values, and expectations of families are not taken into account by the schools. Indeed, parents often

report that teachers do not listen to what they have to say; instead, teachers assume a dominant role, which impedes parents from participating in their children's education (Lemmer, 2012). Also, schools tend to deprive parents of valuable information and rarely involve parents in decision-making. For example, parents have complained that schools do not inform them of the challenges that their children face until an intervention is needed, at which point teachers simply inform parents of the intervention the school decided to implement (Pushor & Murphy, 2010). Such practices discourage parents from becoming engaged in their children's education. Moreover, when teachers act as experts and deny parents the possibility of participating in decision-making, parents may feel blamed for their children's misbehaviour. For example, in the experience of the mothers in Pushor and Murphy's study (2010), parent-teacher communication revolved around teachers informing them about their children's misbehaviours or academic challenges, without offering them the opportunity to participate in finding a solution. Consequently, these mothers felt that the school blamed them and their children for the challenges their children faced in school. According to Pushor and Murphy (2010), indirectly assigning blame through dominant behaviours starts a cycle of negativity from school to home, which results in children not receiving adequate help at school or at home. It thus may be more beneficial to children if teachers, rather than acting as experts, reached out to parents for help in dealing with the challenges encountered in their classrooms.

Challenges of establishing home-school partnerships. Schools may encounter certain practical difficulties that deter them from consulting parents before making decisions. For example, time constraints, limited funding, insufficient staff, or inappropriate training of personnel on parental engagement can render parental consultation on decision-making difficult to implement (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). When schools decided to implement programs that

promote parental engagement and home-school partnerships, some teachers complained that such programs are time and energy-demanding. At the end of the implementation process, however, most teachers concluded that the program and the newly formed partnerships between parents and teachers brought significant benefits (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). As such, middle school teachers stated that reaching out to parents was particularly beneficial when discipline problems were encountered in the classroom. When consulted on addressing disciplinary problems, parents proposed effective solutions and volunteered their time to help out. At the high school level, teachers believed that family and school partnerships were necessary to prevent behaviours that place students at risk for academic failure and school dropout (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). In conclusion, the long-term benefits of forming partnerships with parents probably outweigh the short-term demands that it places on schools and teachers.

Home-school partnerships have the potential of benefitting all the parties involved: children, parents, teachers, and the community. However, establishing a healthy partnership is challenging. Lemmer (2012) analyzed the literature and identified the most common barriers to home-school communication. These barriers pertain to the nature of teacher-parent interactions. As such, teachers tend to assume a more powerful position, rendering parents anxious and unable to express their personal expectations and points of views. Pushor also believes that there is a power imbalance between teachers and parents. In her work, Pushor argues that parents' voices are minimized by the Canadian school system (Pushor, 2009; Pushor 2011, Pushor & Murphy, 2010). According to Pushor, Canadian schools follow the model of protectorates, where teachers act as experts and protectors of children and parents (Pushor & Murpphy, 2010). Such an approach, to parent-teacher communication, silences parents' voices and hinders their engagement in school.

The power imbalance between teachers and parents also reinforces the formation of stereotypes, which further hinders the possibility of collaboration between parents and teachers. Stereotypes are formed and maintained by the way we think and the way we relate to others in social contexts (Mackie, Hamiltorn, Susskind, & Rosselli, 1996). The way we relate to others is influenced by the way we think. Thinking, in return, is influenced by our own culture (Mackie et al., 1996). Thus, when people from different backgrounds interact, they interpret the interaction based on their own culture, which can lead to stereotype formation and to misunderstandings. Therefore, in order to facilitate parent-teachers communication, it may be essential that teachers learn about the cultures of parents. Indeed, in their study investigating immigrant parental engagement practices in the province of Québec, Beauregard, Petrakos and Dupont (2014) concluded that it may be important for teachers to look beyond parents' actions and practices. Failing to understand the reasons behind parents' practices can lead teachers to make inaccurate assumptions about immigrant parents. Given that Québec is a highly diverse and multicultural province, successful parent-teacher communication plays a particularly significant role in fostering parental engagement. In fact, immigrant parents frequently felt, during their interaction with school personnel, that they were judged for being different (Beauregard, Petrakos &Dupont2014). If teachers assume the role of experts, opportunities for open, two-way dialogue between parents and teachers is lost. Without open dialogue, it may be difficult for teachers and parents to learn about each other's culture, traditions, values, and practices, which may lead to stereotype formation and cultural barriers. In effect, Canadian educators and teachers tend to look outward, focusing on cultural barriers to communication with parents, rather than looking inward to become aware of how their own beliefs and assumptions shape their practice (Pushor, 2011). In order to foster successful parent-teacher interactions and communication, it may be

necessary for teachers to become accustomed to the cultures of their students' families, by enabling open dialogue with parents.

Benefits of home-school partnerships. Parental engagement has the potential of positively impacting academic performance at all levels of schooling, from kindergarten to high-school graduation (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007). Parental engagement and effective parent-teacher communication appear to be especially beneficial during transition phases, such as the transition to kindergarten, or from kindergarten to elementary school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011).   In Petrakos and Lehrer's investigation (2011) of parents' and teachers' perceptions of family-school communication during transition to kindergarten, parents and teachers alike reported that parent-teacher communication was essential to a smooth transition. Despite their agreement on the importance of a good family-school relationship, parents' and teachers' views on parent-teacher interactions differed. As such, teachers' priorities during the transition phase centered around parental presence and involvement in school activities, whereas parents' priority was establishing quality relationships with teachers. Parents also emphasised the importance of having realistic and inclusive practices for working parents who cannot be physically present in school. This study's results are evidence that parents' and teachers' perspectives of what constitutes a successful family-school relationship may differ. Such differences in perspectives, if not acknowledged and anticipated, may pose significant barriers to parent-teacher communication.

Home-school Partnerships and Grade Level

Parental engagement and grade level. Despite its demonstrated benefits, parental engagement decreases as children advance in to the upper grades (Izzo et al., 1999; Powell et al., 2012; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Izzo et al. explored in their study (1999) how parental

engagement changed from kindergarten to the third year of elementary school. The quality and frequency of parent-teacher interactions and of parents' school-based and home-based engagement were rated by teachers, over a period of three years. It is important to note that teachers reported being unaware of parental practices at home for one third of parents, which renders any changes in parental engagement in home-based educational activities hard to assess. The results of the study indicated that the frequency and quality of parent-teacher contact, as well as parental participation in school activities, declined from kindergarten to third grade. Another study has shown an overall decrease in parental provision of home-based cognitive stimulation from prekindergarten to kindergarten, and from kindergarten to first grade (Powell et al., 2012). We can therefore conclude that the level of parental engagement in education tends to decrease from preschool to school and continue to decrease with each grade attained. Indeed, Sanders and Epstein (1998) also found in their study on school-family-community partnerships, that parental engagement in education was higher in middle school than in high school. Perceiving their adolescent children as independent, the interviewed parents of high-school students tended to underestimate the amount of parental engagement that may be needed for them to do well in school. According to the interviewed teachers, parental engagement in high school tends to be different than parental engagement in middle school. Nonetheless, parental engagement is equally essential to high-school students' academic success (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). These studies suggest that parental engagement tends to decrease as children advance in their education. Since family-school relationships are important throughout children's education, it may be beneficial to students if schools proactively sought to form partnerships with parents and adapted their parental engagement practices to the developmental needs of children.

Parent-teacher communication and grade level. Parent-teacher communication at the preschool level is distinct from parent-teacher communication at the school level. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) examined the longitudinal changes in family-school communication as children progressed from preschool to kindergarten. The authors found that there was a great decrease in family-school communication from preschool to kindergarten, regardless of family factors and of the frequency of communication in preschool. Also, the type of communication between parents and teachers changed from shorter and frequent interactions in preschool, to longer and infrequent interactions in kindergarten. These findings inform us that family-school interactions diminish significantly from preschool to school.

Home-school partnerships at the preschool level have been less thoroughly investigated than Home-school partnerships at the school level. Some studies examining the outcomes of Head Start programs designed to enhance children's school readiness by increasing parental engagement and strengthening the parent-teacher relationship have shown positive associations between parental engagement, parent-teacher relationships, and school readiness (Hindman & Morrison, 2011; Mendez, 2010). As such, educator outreach was associated positively with family engagement, which in return was positively associated with children's decoding, vocabulary, and positive approaches to learning (Hindman & Morrison, 2011). Moreover, a quality parent-teacher relationship was associated with children's literacy and early math competence, as well as with higher levels of parental participation in the Head Start program and higher resulting levels of parental engagement in education (Mendez, 2010). These findings propose that parent-teachers partnerships can potentially contribute to increasing parental engagement levels and consequently increasing school performance. The findings also suggest

that offering family-focused preventive intervention programs at the preschool level may be

highly beneficial to children's later school success.

Teacher Education Programs

As previously shown, successful parent-teacher communication contributes to building

home-school partnerships, which in return favour parental engagement and children's educational

success. Therefore, teacher education programs must educate pre-service teachers on having

sensitive interactions with diverse parents. Despite the literature evidencing the important role of

parent-teacher communication in parental engagement and in children's educational success,

most Canadian universities do not offer undergraduate teacher education courses focusing on

parents (Pushor, 2009). American pre-service teacher programs also tend to offer inappropriate

education for engaging with families (Evans, 2013). Consequently, recently graduated teachers

often feel unprepared for communicating with, and engaging with, parents (Evans, 2013).

Moreover, the limited number of courses that are available to pre-service teachers in North

America may not be effective in preparing them for parent-teacher communication. Indeed,

researchers have repeatedly emphasized the need for pre-service programs to offer more

extensive education on parent interaction and communication skills (Blasi, 2002; Cheatham &

Ostrosky, 2009; Dotger, 2009; Dotger, Dotger, & Maher, 2010; Evans, 2013). Indeed, in his

study examining the efforts in higher education to prepare pre-service teachers to work with

families, Evans (2013) identified multiple shortcomings of the courses currently offered. The

most significant shortcoming of parent-teacher communication courses was their structure, in

that they offered limited opportunities for pre-service teachers to interact with students' families

and their community (Evans, 2013). Dotger et al. (2010) also agreed that courses on

communication with families tend not to offer sufficient opportunities for pre-service teachers to

interact with parents, resulting in gaps between theory and practice. In addition to the lack of exposure to families, most courses fail to prepare pre-service teachers to address the cultural disconnect between them and the diverse families of the students they serve (Evans, 2013). Most courses may not offer practical preparation for pre-service teachers to engage parents in ways to support their children in schools (Evans, 2013). Further contributing to the inadequate preparation of pre-service teachers for parent interaction are the mixed messages from schools concerning teachers' role in fostering parental engagement, as well as the lack of a unified definition for the concept of parental engagement (Evans, 2013). Consequently, pre-service teachers are often inadequately prepared for interacting with parents from diverse backgrounds.

Parent-teacher communication courses. While Canadian universities have grasped in recent years the importance of offering courses on parent communication to pre-service teachers, the effectiveness of such courses has been understudied. To my knowledge, there are no studies examining the long-term impact of educating pre-service teachers on parent communication skills. A limited number of researchers have investigated how pre-service teachers' perspectives on family-school collaboration changed following their participation in a course on parent communication. The parent-teacher communication courses that have proved to be most effective in changing pre-service teachers' perspectives involved some type of direct experience with families and focused on relationship building (Evans, 2013).

The pedagogical approaches used to train pre-service teachers vary widely. However, the most effective pedagogical approaches seem to be the ones that teach pre-service teachers to establish relationships with parents and to recognize the expertise of parents (Evans, 2013). In other words, the parental communication courses that more effectively prepare pre-service teachers for engaging with families seem to focus on establishing home-school partnerships; one

such pedagogical approach was evaluated by Blasi (2002). In his study, Blasi (2002) investigated the impact of a pre-service teacher education course on pre-service teachers' preparedness to work with families. The course focused on building partnerships with the families of at-risk students and provided opportunities for interaction with families in their homes. Pre-service teachers' perspectives of at risk students were assessed with questionnaires before and after the completion of the course. Moreover, the evolution of pre-service teachers' perspectives of at-risk students and their families was monitored with weekly journal entries and regular focus group discussions. The analysis indicated that, after the completion of the course, pre-service teachers changed their perspectives regarding the school's responsibility to children and families; they perceived the need for educators to build trusting relationships with families, to help empower families, to provide them with resources, and to consider their culture when building a curriculum. Through interaction with the families of students, pre-service teachers became aware of the importance of events and lived experiences on children's development and learning and they began to perceive families labelled "at-risk" as families "of promise". The results of this study raise questions regarding the effects of pre-service teacher-parent interactions within educational institutions. Can similar shifts in pre-service teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher relationships occur when the interaction takes place within an educational institution, such as a university, as part of pre-service teacher preparation?

Dotger et al. (2010) devised an innovative educational technique that allowed pre-service and in-service teachers to interact with simulated parents from various contexts. The simulated parent pedagogical approach consisted of videotaping teachers while they interacted with hired actors who played the part of a parent. The parent roles were played according to a vignette which informed actors how to react to trigger words and gestures. Following the videotaped

interaction, teachers engaged in reflection, discussion, and analysis of the videotape. The simulated parent technique is unique, in that it allowed teachers to engage in real-life problem solving while benefitting of guided reflection opportunities. This pedagogical approach helped pre-service and in-service teachers to achieve increased awareness of parental contexts and perspectives (Dotger, 2009). As a result, the teachers adopted the use of less direct and more empathic verbalisations and paid increased attention to their own political, professional, and moral geographies (Dotger, 2009). In conclusion, the simulated parent pedagogical approach helped teachers acquire insights into their own beliefs and assumptions and acknowledge how these may influence parental interaction. Moreover, teachers realized that knowing parents' backgrounds and points of view facilitates parent-teacher interactions.

A different pedagogical approach, adopted in a graduate-level course addressing the positioning of parents in schools, showed that educating teachers on parental engagement has the potential of improving teachers' practices. Pushor (2009) analyzed a teacher's retrospective account of a lived parent interaction experience that took place before her participation in the parental engagement course. The teacher narrated and interpreted her lived experience in the light of the knowledge acquired in the course. The course centered on challenging assumptions, placing parents in context, and understanding parents' place in the curriculum and in educational policies. In her reflection paper, the teacher acknowledged the assumptions that she had made during the narrated parental interaction. She also acknowledged how her assumptions silenced parents' voices. By participating in the graduate course on parental engagement, the teacher understood how her past behaviour was invalidating to parents and how it furthered the power imbalance that is inherent in the structure and hierarchy of schools (Pushor, 2009).

Outcomes of parent-teacher communication courses. Parent communication education courses have the potential of increasing pre-service teachers' and in-service teachers' parental communication skills. In a review of parent communication education programs, Evans (2013) identified the most common positive outcomes of educating pre-service teachers on parent communication. As such, after being trained, pre-service teachers demonstrated (1) increased confidence in their ability to work with families, (2) increased awareness of their personal prejudices, (3) increased awareness of diversity, and (4) increased ability to use knowledge about families and communities to improve teaching (Evans, 2013). However, not all parent communication courses had a positive impact on pre-service teachers' perspectives, suggesting that certain pedagogical approaches are more effective than others. Indeed, research suggests that creating opportunities for pre-service teachers to interact with families is a necessary, but insufficient, element of an effective pedagogical approach (Evans, 2013). It appears that certain immersion experiences may reinforce personal biases among some pre-service teachers. For example, Dunn-Kenney (2010) investigated the impact of service learning with families living in deep poverty on pre-service early childhood educators and revealed that some of the pre-service educators either avoided confronting their own biases, or had their biases confirmed. The results of this study suggest that the simple act of engaging with families is not sufficient to challenge pre-service teachers' biases and that more complex forces are necessary to affect pre-service teachers' perceptions and consequently their ability to work in partnership with diverse families. It is thus essential to follow the evolution of pre-service teachers' perspectives over the course of their participation in parent communication courses, in order to understand the important contributors to any changes or shifts in their perceptions. For example, assessing parents' changing perspectives as they interact with pre-service teachers before and after they have

followed a course on parent-teacher communication, can illuminate our understanding of what contributes to effective practices or pedagogical approaches to teaching these concepts.

Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives

In addition to offering insights into the effectiveness of pedagogical practices, the perspectives of parents and teachers can further our understanding of parental engagement and of complex individual and institutional interactions that it entails. Furthermore, considering the viewpoints of parents and teachers can result in vital progress towards describing a more diverse definition of parent engagement, which in turn will facilitate a more complex approach to preparing teachers to engage with diverse families and to understanding the impact of parental engagement on children's learning across different settings. Moreover, the perspectives of parents and teachers on parental engagement can enlighten researchers with regards to the aspects of parental engagement that may be beneficial, and the aspects that may be potentially detrimental to the education and development of children. In their review of literature on parental engagement, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) concluded that parents' attitudes and behaviours related to children's education could also influence students' learning and educational success. Therefore, parental beliefs and perspectives may play an important role in the positive student outcomes associated with parental engagement. Thus, when researching parent-teacher interactions, it is important to include parents' perspectives in addition to teachers'.

The transformative paradigm is a research framework developed by Donna Mertens for addressing inequality in society using culturally competent methods (Mertens, 2007). According to the transformative paradigm, power and privilege need to be included in research, as they are important determinants of which reality is privileged in a research context (Mertens, 2007). Parents' opinions regarding educational decisions tend to be disregarded within the

Canadian schooling system, therefore placing teachers in a position of authority within schools (Pushor & Murphy, 2010). The power imbalance between parents and teachers that is inherent to the schooling system is perpetuated by research neglecting parent's perspectives on educational matters. It is thus important to give parents a voice by including their opinion in research investigating parent-teacher communication. Moreover, in order to avoid reinforcing the teacher privilege within schools, it may be essential to include parents' perspectives in teacher education programs. An example of a successful integration of parental perspectives in teacher education is Concordia University's parent-teacher communication course for pre-service teachers; this course considers parents' perspectives by inviting parents in class, every week, to share their thoughts on parent-teacher communication. Consequently, parents are empowered to contribute valuable insights, which may render the education program more effective. Moreover, conducting research in an environment in which the teacher privilege is removed may uncover important elements necessary to building successful parent-teacher partnerships. Possibly even more importantly, enabling parents to express their opinions within a teacher-education course may bring about social change at a small scale. As such, the realities of parents and pre-service teachers participating in the course may be transformed by this opportunity for parents to be included in the education of their children and in the education of pre-service teachers. Thus, this empowerment process may be transformative. Therefore, a transformative paradigm is thus best suited to assess the evolution of parents' and teachers' perspectives as the course progresses.

The Current Study

In the proposed study, I investigated whether parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives of parent-teacher relationships were altered following continuous, close interaction

with each other, in the context of a pre-service teacher education course on parental

communication. The course focused on the role parents and teachers play in the various stages

of the child's cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as on the importance of

developing positive relationships between teachers and their students and families. The

pedagogical approach of this course was unique, in that it provided pre-service teachers with the

opportunity to engage in on-going interaction with the parents of children attending Concordia

University's observation nursery. The nursery parents participated in class activities throughout

the length of the course, where they shared their parenting and educational concerns, questions,

and observations. Moreover, pre-service teachers conducted weekly observations in the nursery,

as well as weekly discussion groups with the nursery parents.

The curriculum of this parent communication course allowed pre-service teachers to

practice their parental communication skills, while simultaneously engaging in reflective

activities. Pre-service teachers' interactions with parents were facilitated by the course instructor,

through guided class and group discussions and reflective activities. The pre-service teachers

were enabled to gain insights and track the evolution of their own beliefs using reflective journal

entries and class discussions. The close, continuous interaction allowed both pre-service teachers

and parents to become aware of each other's perspectives, thus gaining insight into how to

establish successful home-school partnerships.

In this study, I recorded throughout the course pre-service teachers' and parents' beliefs

and opinions on parent-teacher relationships in order to paint a picture of their evolution

following interaction and course participation. A comparison of the initial and subsequent

beliefs held by pre-service teachers informed us of the impact that the course had on their

understanding of parent-teacher communication. Also, by contrasting pre-existing perspectives

to newly acquired perspectives, we were able to discuss the effectiveness of the course in preparing pre-service teachers for parental interaction. Furthermore, an analysis of the parents' perspectives, as well as of the impact that the nursery environment and the course had on them, enlightened us with regards to how home-school communication may be facilitated and how parental engagement may be encouraged.

Overall, this study added to the extant literature by furthering our understanding of: (1) the elements that render pre-service teacher education courses on parent communication effective, (2) the impact of continuous, close interactions on pre-service teachers' and parents' perspectives on parent-teacher communication, (3) parent's perspectives on parent-teacher communication when they are empowered to voice their wants and their concerns, and (4) the potential benefits that may arise from forming parent-teacher partnerships in preschool. Moreover, this study cast a spotlight on the link between parent-teacher interactions and parental engagement.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the evolution of parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher relationships during continuous, close interaction in the context of a pre-service teacher education course. This study employed a phenomenological tradition, which facilitated acquiring an understanding of how parents and pre-service teachers experience their interactions with each other. This study adopted a transformative paradigm, as the research setting and the methods employed have the potential to bring about social change (Mertens, 2012). The reflective activities, guided interactions, and facilitated conversations in which the participants engaged, contributed to a shift in perspectives.

Such a shift in perspective, in return, may alter the way teachers and parents choose to interact with each other in the future. In accordance with the transformative paradigm, I sought to understand parents' perception of the decision-making power of parents and teachers when it comes to children's' school education, and how these perceptions may foster parent-teacher communication issues.

Consistent with transformative axiological assumptions, I respected participants' cultures and backgrounds in my interaction with them and I reflected and recognized my own biases. It has been shown that the opinions of parents may sometimes be disregarded by teachers and their decision-making power within educational institutions is generally limited (Pushor & Murphy, 2010). I thus sought to incorporate parents' voices in my research report. The ontological philosophy of science is based on the idea that truth is subjective, thus multiple truths are possible. The transformative ontological assumptions perceive that different versions of reality are given privilege over others, leading to the marginalization of the views of certain individuals. Thus, in hopes of stimulating social action, I investigated how the power imbalance inherent to the Canadian educational system may influence parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives, and consequently the formation of partnerships between parents and teachers. Epistemologically, knowledge is constructed by the research process. Therefore, insights into the nature of parent-teacher relationships were achieved through continuous dialogue and longitudinal interaction between researcher and participants.

The transformative paradigm, applied to qualitative research, allows researchers to form partnerships with the participants (Mertens, 2012). Researcher-participant partnerships foster a better comprehension of participants' lived experiences and has the potential to transform all the parties involved by reaching a new, common truth. The data collection strategy was adapted to

the participants' backgrounds and strived to identify the participants' values (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The Researcher

Dual role. As the main researcher, I also had the role of a teaching assistant for the parent-teacher communication course. Being the teaching assistant allowed me to be continuously present during class time and to engage in data collection discreetly. Continuous presence in class facilitated establishing rapport with the pre-service teachers and parents. However, the dual role as teaching assistant and researcher brought about the risk that some pre-service teachers may have felt pressure to participate in this research project in order to increase their chances of getting better grades in the course. However, this ethical issue was carefully considered when recruiting pre-service teachers into the study. The strategy for obtaining consent from pre-service teachers is discussed in more detail in the section addressing sampling.

Insider and outsider role. Both as a researcher investigating parent-teacher relationships and as a teaching assistant, I was an outsider to the lived experiences and perspectives of parents and pre-service teachers. However, my knowledge of the scientific literature on the topic of parent-teacher relationships positioned me as an insider for the participating pre-service teachers. Also, by being a parent of young children, I may have shared certain similar experiences with the participating parents, and thus I may have been viewed by them as an insider.

My personal and professional characteristics had the potential of influencing the participants' perception of me as a researcher. My background in psychology and education, paired with my desire to understand and support families through life challenges, may have depicted me, to the participants, as knowledgeable on the researched topic. Being a graduate student in the Child Studies master's program may have helped the pre-service teachers to see

me as a fellow student, while simultaneously driving participating parents to see me as somewhat of an expert on parent-teacher relationships. Moreover, as a working wife and as a mother of a toddler and an infant, participants likely perceived me as a concerned parent with a personal interest in learning how to successfully navigate parent-teacher relationships.

   Reflecting on subjectivity. In qualitative research, the researcher is inseparable from the research process and the researcher's interpretations are inseparable from the participants' voices (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher's subjectivity has to be addressed as an inclusive part of qualitative research, in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the research results. I thus considered how my personal biases and characteristics came in play during data collection and analysis. I engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process in order to become aware of the ways in which my subjectivity may impact the results of the study. With the purpose of keeping my personal opinions in check, I wrote reflective journal entries and I took reflective field notes. Moreover, I sought to represent the participants' perspectives faithfully, by allowing codes and themes to emerge from the data collection process and by bracketing my assumptions. Also, I used member checking to ensure that the parents' perspectives were accurately captured in the final research report.

The Research Context

   The data collection took place in two different contexts: the university classroom and the nursery. In both environments, parents, pre-service teachers, and researchers interacted on a weekly basis for a period of 13 weeks, which is the span of one semester for the course. For the length of the course, pre-service teachers met every Thursday morning at the nursery for observation and class activities in the presence of parents. Then the parents joined the pre-service teachers in the classroom, for one hour of class-wide or group discussion. Following the

one-hour discussion with parents, pre-service teachers engaged either in further discussions or in a lecture (see Appendix A for the outline of the topics to covered in class). The interactions and discussions between parents and pre-services teachers were facilitated by the teaching assistant, a student in the Master's in Child Studies program who conducted this study as part of her master's thesis, and by the course instructor, who is co-investigator and supervisor of this thesis.

The pre-service teachers and researchers had the opportunity to interact during class time both in the presence and absence of parents. In order to allow the researchers to interact privately with the parents, the main researcher organized individual interviews outside of class time. The setting for individual interviews varied according to the participating parents' preferences, but remained within the nursery context (i.e., a classroom, a playroom, outside, in front of the nursery, and in the kitchen).

Sampling

The sample of the study consisted of 19 pre-service teachers enrolled in "Communication: Child, Parent and Teacher" (a.k.a. parent communication course), offered at Concordia University within the teacher education program, and of 5 parents who had at least one child attending Concordia's Observation nursery. As done every year, the nursery recruited children between three to four years old by advertising in community papers (i.e., brochures distributed at places frequented by parents with young children, Montreal Families). Additionally, the main researcher advertised the nursery's program on social media (i.e., in Facebook-based groups for parents). I engaged in convenience purposeful sampling, inviting parents and pre-service teachers from the parent communication course to participate in the study. While my sample was not representative of all parents and pre-service teachers, it

allowed me to obtain rich information on the topic of parent-teacher communication in a context that was designed to educate pre-service teachers about working with parents.

Obtaining consent and ethical issues. On the first day of class, we informed parents and pre-service teachers about the research study and about the pending ethics approval. On the third week of classes we received ethics approval and obtained consent from the pre-service teachers and nursery parents who wanted to participate in the study. We made it clear that the choice to participate in the research study was at their discretion and that the study's data collection would not affect the structure, curriculum content, and activities of the course. We also informed the pre-service teachers on multiple occasions that for the duration of the course, the researchers would only be aware of participating parents and ignorant with regards to participating pre-service teachers. It was also emphasized to pre-service teachers that participation in the study brought them no advantage in the course and that the teacher and teaching assistant would not know their decision before the final grades are submitted. Therefore, all the activities that were part of the course run as usual and data was collected throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, only the data from the consenting participants was included in the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Parents and pre-service teachers were informed that they can withdraw their consent in the study at any time during the research process.

To guarantee that the teacher, the teaching assistant, and other researchers involved in the study were blind to pre-service teachers' participation, consent from pre-service teachers was obtained by a research assistant who was not involved in the study in any way; this person arrived in the class to explain the consent process and collected the consent letters, put them in a sealed envelope and kept them in the lab until the end of the course. Once the final grades were

submitted, the researchers involved in this study were informed of the names of pre-service

teachers who chose to participate, and analysis of their data began. Such a procedure ensured

that the pre-service teachers were not coerced into participating and that the data collection did

not influence the process of grading the pre-service teachers.

Data Collection and Procedure

The methods we used in this study consist of: (1) focus groups, (2) individual interviews

with parents, (3) parent-teacher interviews, (4) pre-service teachers' reflective response

assignments, (5) pre and post open-ended questionnaires for pre-service teachers, (6)

demographic information, and (7) the main researcher's reflective journal and field notes. A

table summary of the data collection process is offered in Appendix B.

Focus groups. Consenting parents and pre-service teachers participated in separate focus

groups throughout the course: initial and subsequent focus groups were held for pre-service

teachers and another focus group for parents. There was also a common focus group (i.e.,

recorded class discussion facilitated by the instructor), in which both parents and pre-service

teachers participated. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain insights into parent's and pre-

service teachers' initial and acquired perceptions of parent-teacher relationships, as well as into

their assumptions and expectations concerning parent-teacher communication. The focus groups

were facilitated by the instructor of the course. Such discussion focus group are a typical practice

that that take place every semester to collect the perceptions of parents and pre-service teachers

and to gather information that help the instructor prioritize the content of the course. The focus

groups were loosely structured, and the questions were open-ended, in order to allow parents and

pre-service teachers to freely share their thoughts regarding parent-teacher interactions and

parental engagement in education (see Appendix C for focus group protocol). The focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

Individual interviews. Participating parents were interviewed individually at the end of the course by the researcher. The interviews centered on parents' experiences at Concordia's nursery and within the course and their newly acquired perspectives on parent-teacher interactions. The interview structure was flexible, informal, and conversational, to allow the parents to share information freely. The interview protocol was organized by general themes, with open-ended sample questions and probes (see Appendix D). I avoided using pre-formulated questions during the interview, as they may have rendered the conversation less natural. Instead, I gently guided the conversation with the use of probes. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Mock parent-teacher interviews. Towards the end of the course, pre-service teachers were instructed to interview parents, during class time, in small groups. The topic of the interviews were parents' experiences at the nursery. Pre-service teachers were asked to write, in groups of two or three, their own interview protocols and were given the opportunity to submit their interview protocol for feedback prior to conducting the interview.

Pre-service teachers' reflective response assignments. Pre-service teachers were asked to write two short essays to reflect on their perceptions of the issues addressed in class. Pre-service teachers were able to select among numerous reflective questions asked at the end of each textbook chapter. For the purpose of the study, we analyzed the reflective assignments of consenting pre-service teachers that are directly relevant to the topic of the study. As such, we examined the reflective assignments in which pre-service teachers reflected on their own attitudes and biases about families while commenting on how they may impact their work with

children and their families. Analyzing the reflective response assignments informed us of the evolution of pre-service teachers' perceptions of parent-teacher relationships.

Questionnaires. Pre-service teachers were asked to fill in a pen-and-paper, open-ended questionnaire at the beginning of the semester, as well as at the end of the semester. The same questions were asked in both questionnaires, with the exception that the questionnaire given at the beginning of the course also included demographic information questions (see Appendix E for the questionnaire). The majority of the questions were adapted from Blasi's (2002) questionnaire assessing pre-service teachers' understanding of the term "at risk" children. Other questions were inspired by Walker et al.'s questionnaires (2005) assessing parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from teachers and parents' perceived life context. The purpose of the initial and subsequent questionnaire was to understand pre-service teachers' initial perceptions of parental engagement and parent-teacher communication and to determine whether these perceptions changed following participation in the parent-teacher communication course.

Demographic information was collected from participating parents and all pre-service teachers (see Appendix F for demographic sheet). The demographic information collected allowed the researchers to interpret the results of the study in the light of the participants' personal characteristics. Pre-service teachers enrolled in the parent-teacher communication course were asked to provide basic demographic information in the open-ended questionnaire that they filled in at the beginning of the course. Parents who consented to participate in the study, were given a demographic sheet to fill-in at the beginning of the individual interviews.

Researcher's reflective journal and field notes. I kept a weekly reflective journal (i.e., field notes and reflections of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs) throughout the data collection process, in order to consider my biases as a researcher. In the reflective journal, I recorded my

behaviour, thoughts and biases, as well as the data collection process. I made use of reflective notes to describe and reflect upon the setting of the study and the events that observed before, during, and after data collection. I also described in my reflective field notes interactions between pre-service teachers, parents, and researchers that were not recorded (i.e., weekly discussion groups with parents, guided classroom activities, interactions outside of the class time, etc.).

Data Processing

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded using recording devices and transcribed in Microsoft Word using Express Scribe, a program allowing for loop playback. The reflective response assignments were typed up and submitted in digital format by the participating pre-service teachers. All questionnaires and demographic sheets were given to participants in pen-and-paper format. I recorded reflective journal entries and reflective notes in a personal paper notebook.

Analysis

The data was analyzed according to the phenomenological qualitative tradition, within a transformative research paradigm (Mertens, 2008). In order to accurately represent each participant's voice and to ensure that each participant's perspective is represented, I coded themes that emerged from the data, guided by a priori codes from the three complementary frameworks previously discussed: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental engagement model (1995), and Epstein's home-school partnership model (1987). I coded and triangulated multiple measures: interviews, focus groups, reflective assignments, and open-ended questionnaires. Also, throughout the analysis, I referred to my

reflective journal entries and field notes in order to account for the context in which the data collection happened and for the role that I played in the data collection process.

In the first step of the analysis, I coded each participant's transcript and text separately and individually using first cycle coding methods (Saldaña, 2009). To begin, I employed in-vivo coding, which uses participants' own language as codes. Making use of participants' own language in the first step of the coding process helped limit interpretation and stay true to participants' voices. I continued with value coding, to identify the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs regarding parent-teacher relationships. Value codes enable us to acquire an understanding of participants' lived experiences with parent-teacher communication, by revealing what is important to the participants. Value codes were determined based on the categories that emerged from in-vivo coding. I ended the first cycle coding by theming the data: I regrouped value codes into overarching themes. Theming allowed me to create an accurate narrative of the participants' lived experiences and to identify the essence of the participants' perspectives on parent-teacher relationships (Saldaña, 2009; see Appendix G for samples of coding). Following the coding process, I referred to the emerging codebooks to create a summary of the perspectives and experiences of each parents. To increase authenticity and allow the participants' voices to transpire in the summaries, I included quotes.

In the second step of the analysis, I engaged in second cycle coding, which consists of reorganizing and analyzing data coded through first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009). I used longitudinal coding to assess and compare across time change processes. Longitudinal coding consists of reviewing data categorically, thematically, and comparatively across time in order to assess whether participant change may have occurred (Saldaña, 2009). I thus categorized and compared the data collected according to participant type (parent or pre-service teacher) and

according to the time of the collection (at the beginning or end of the parent-teacher

communication course; see Appendix H for an overview of themes and value codes for each

codebook). Regrouping data according to participant type and time of collection allowed us to

monitor the evolution of the participants' perceptions as the course progressed and to compare

parents' and pre-service teachers' perceptions at the two different time points.

Trustworthiness

I addressed the criteria for trustworthiness that is most applicable to this research study:

credibility, authenticity, dependability, and confirmability (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Credibility and authenticity. Credibility is comparable to the concept of internal

validity used in quantitative research. A credible qualitative study has results that are believable,

from the perspective of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Authenticity, which is similar to

credibility, ensures that the findings report is truthful to the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Only the participants themselves can confirm credibility and authenticity. Therefore, I ensured

that these two criteria of trustworthiness are fulfilled by engaging in member checking. The

member checking process consisted of giving each participating parent a written summary of

their opinions expressed during the focus groups, mock parent-teacher interview, and individual

interview, and asking them to determine if it accurately depicted their beliefs about parent-

teacher relationships.

Dependability is analogous to the notion of reliability used in quantitative research.

Consistency in the research process ensures that the research report is dependable (Hays &

Singh, 2012). Since the context of this study was naturalistic and the researchers exerted very

limited to no control over the setting, it was essential to provide a thick description of the

circumstances of the data collection process. I thus used reflective field notes and a reflective

journal to describe the research context and to reflect on how it may have influenced the research process. To further guarantee the dependability of the research report, I engaged in triangulation of data sources. Thus, I compared the emerging themes from transcripts, questionnaires, field notes, and reflective journal entries, to ensure consistency of findings.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed by others and has as purpose to ensure the neutrality of the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). As the main researcher, I kept in check my thoughts and biases by taking reflective field notes and by keeping a reflective journal throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Moreover, to challenge my interpretation of the findings, I engage in continuous peer checking by discussing coding and analysis with other researchers. We worked in teams of two to three researchers in order to code each transcript. When contradictions in coding arouse within a theme, other researchers were consulted.

Findings

In this longitudinal qualitative analysis, I analyzed 28 open-ended questionnaires for pre-service teachers (14 pre- and 14 post-), 33 reflective responses from pre-service teachers (17 pre- and 16 post-), and a total of 12 transcripts obtained from the triangulation of multiple measures: (1) five in-depth interviews with parents, (2) two student focus groups, one parent focus group, and one class discussion with parents and pre-service teachers, and (3) three mock parent-teacher interviews between the parents and pre-service teachers. I summarised the a priori codes and themes that emerged from the data and discussed them in relation to the four research questions of this study:

(1) What are the nursery parents' perspectives on parent-teacher communication?

(2) Were parents' perspectives on education and on parent-teacher communication altered

by their participation in the nursery's program and in the parent communication course?

(3) How did pre-service teachers' understanding of parent-teacher communication change

following continuous, close interaction with nursery parents?

(4) Did pre-service teachers improve their perceived preparedness for working with

families by participating in the course?

See Appendix I for an overview of data source by research question answered.

Additionally, I construed the emergent findings within the transformative paradigm, in

order to capture the transformation in parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives, as they

interacted with each other over the duration of the school term. In interpreting the data, I

considered the context of the study (i.e., the nursery and the parent-teacher communication

course) and the power relationship between parents and pre-service teachers (i.e. parents

empowered to voice their expectations for teachers). I also integrated in the analysis the socio-

contextual factors that I captured in my field notes and reflective journal.

In the first part of the result section, I addressed the first two research questions from

above, that are relevant to the nursery parents. In the second part of the results section, I

answered the last two research questions, relevant to the pre-service teachers. Despite having

divided the results section according to the participant type for organizational purposes, I

considered in my analysis the influence that the parents and the pre-service teachers had on each

other and made links between the parents' and the pre-service teachers' opinions.

Part I: The Nursery Parents

Prior to addressing the findings in relation to the research questions, I offer a detailed

description of the research environment, through the eyes of the participating parents. In the

following section, I paint a picture of the nursery, the nursery's educators, and of the parent-teacher communication course, by summarizing the views and experiences of five parents whose children attended Concordia's nursery program for the duration of the course.

The research environment through the eyes of the participating parents. The participating parents seemed to have a positive outlook on the nursery and the parent-teacher communication course and were eager to show their appreciation of the friendly and professional personnel and the welcoming environment. During my individual discussion with the nursery parents on the topic of parent-teacher communication, the parents shared their views of the nursery and its educators, and of the course and the pre-service teachers in it. The parents also shared their perspectives on the nursery and the educators with the pre-service teachers, during the mock parent-teacher interviews.

The nursery. Many parents said that they were "very satisfied" with the nursery and believed that it was "a perfect fit" for their children and themselves (e.g., Nina: "I think I chose this daycare because it worked with who I am"). The parents highlighted multiple positive aspects of the nursery's program: the small group size and high educator-to-child ratio, the "appealing set-up" (e.g., Stella: "it was bright, and it was full of these beautiful toys"), the regular outdoor time (e.g., Claire: "Every single day they're going out […]it's really important for me") , and the possibility of being present and involved in the classroom (e.g., Nina: "I loved the fact that parents can stay or go here [at the nursery]."). Overall, the parents described the nursery as a place that is "relaxed and open", with a "very close community feel", and where "everyone's interest is kinda taken care of".

Program improvements suggested. While all the parents indicated that they were highly satisfied, some were able to identify elements of the program that could be improved. As such,

some parents commented with regards to the length of the program, which is offered three half-days a week. For example, Stella said: "My only...wish, I guess, is that [...] there were more hours available."/ "In an ideal universe, there would be, like a full-time option and a part-time option". Also, Claire stated: "A whole week [nursery program] it would be great."

Furthermore, some parents spoke of the need to include more structured and educational activities in the nursery's program, in order to prepare children for school. As such, Nina said: "Progressing into school […], they [children]'re gonna have to follow some instructions. […] it's time to...change gears a little bit.", and Susie said: "I wish there was a little bit more educational activity". Some of the parents appreciated the exploratory, play-based nursery curriculum that encouraged literacy through categorization and labeling of toys and through child-led projects (e.g., the son of Stella created music sheets with the help of the educators). While some parents appreciated that the nursery's program was "not structured rigidly", others would have liked to see more structured, whole group activities in the gross motor room, such as "Ring around the Rosie", or "Duck, duck, goose", and more structured group educational activities, such as worksheets for "reading, writing and math", in order to prepare children from kindergarten.

Challenge encountered by one of the parents. The nursery's program encourages a slow transition for the new students, many of whom have never attended a daycare program previously, by allowing parents remain in the classroom for extended periods of time. While the possibility of extended parental presence in the classroom made the nursery a good fit for most of the parents and children in this study, it also led to an issue for one parent. As such, Susie' child, who did not initially feel the need of having his mother present at the nursery, started imitating the other children by asking his mother to stay around. As such, Susie said: "he [son] said because all the other moms are there. [...] it started to backfire.". This posed a problem for

Susie, who could not always be present and who valued highly her son's independence. Nonetheless, Susie found that, when it came to the possibility of parental presence in the classroom, "the pros totally outweigh the cons". The mother was hopeful that the following year, with the advent of different students and a different "vibe", her son would regain his independence within the nursery.

The educators. Parents whose children attend the nursery often choose to remain at the nursery even after their child's successful transition to the program. These parents stay in a room that is adjacent to the classroom, in order to talk to each other and to observe their children through a one-way mirror. Such a practice allows parents to observe how the educators interact with their children on a regular basis. All parents showed high appreciation and admiration for the work done by the nursery educators. For example, Stella said:

> I admire the way that they [educators] operate. I love how calm they are all the time, and how they take things slowly, like if, even if a kid is grabbing something, they don't...grab it away from them… [...] I love to see them problem solve.

According Nina, the educators' openness is what "made the [parent-teacher] relationship" and "what [made] the nursery a great place". Susie emphasized that, thanks to the creative and "child-centered approach" of the educators, the nursery became her child's happy personal "universe". Therefore, we can argue that the parents' satisfaction with the nursery can be, at least in part, attributed to the professionalism of the nursery educators.

Furthermore, it appears that the educators may have also played an important role in these parents' decision of enrolling their children at the nursery. As such, Claire pointed out that the educators gave her "a good feeling" from the start, because they were "very friendly and open" and she felt that she can freely share her concerns with them. Claire said: "I can come with

my concerns", "they [educators] understand and they're…uhm…trying to answer, quickly and give me some solutions", and "I have a chance to talk to them every time...while I'm here". Stella said that her son felt immediately comfortable at the nursery because the educators "were so smiley, and welcoming, and caaalm". This mother has felt "so welcome and comfortable" from the beginning, as the educators were "always very receptive" and the communication with them was "really direct and really comfortable and loving".

The parent-teacher communication course. Some parents shared that they enjoyed being present in class (e.g., Stella: "I really liked coming, just to Harriet's [course instructor] class") and that they learned a lot from the having participated in the course (e.g., Susie: "I learned a lot from Harriet [course instructor]"). As such, some of the nursery parents said that they have acquired a better understanding of the education system (e.g., Susie: "So now I have a much better idea of different scenarios...like what the education system can look like") and that they learned about teachers as people (e.g., Stella: "I learned a lot, learned a lot about people, in general, and, and teachers. I liked being here and seeing all these students as individuals").

Moreover, Susie saw her participation in the parent-teacher communication course as an opportunity to share her opinions and to have an impact on the education of future teachers:

This is my chance of [...] of sharing with them [pre-service teachers] my […] concerns, my interests and my goals before they even […] hit the road. They [pre-service teachers] are still establishing their values, they are still establishing who they are as a teacher, so it's like the perfect time to come in.

Thanks to the instructor's efforts to include parents in the parent-teacher communication course, several parents left the course feeling empowered to pursue relationships with their children's current and future teachers. For example, Susie said: "She [instructor] made me realize yes these

are very like, valid thoughts and these are worth talking about and they are worth, you know, mentioning to your kids' educators.". Also, Betty said: "Harriet [instructor] definitely made me realize that there is a way [...] of integrating our [parents'] wants and needs in the system.".

The pre-service teachers in the course. The parents used multiple terms to describe their relationship with the pre-service teachers in the parent-teacher communication course, such as "very opened", "very friendly", "positive", and "refreshing". According to some parents, the pre-service teachers showed interest in what the parents had to say and were open-minded, "very aware", and "very perceptive". As such, Claire said: "They [pre-service teachers] were very open and curious about what I [nursery parent] have to say.", and Betty said: "I [nursery parent] can say...a lot of things here, that I might not say other places like, express my opinions how I don't like that I cannot go into school and stuff.".

Furthermore, Claire described her interactions with the pre-service teachers as "equal", in that the conversations were well-balanced. Claire said: "we [pre-service teachers and parents] are talking to each other and having conversation". Claire appreciated that the pre-service teachers were welcoming toward her infant son, who was present with her in their classroom: "I brought J. [her son] to the class, everybody was like smiling, happy mood".

Stella appreciated most "how respectful of the child, and how respectful of the parent, and how respectful of different needs" the pre-service teachers were. After having interacted with the pre-service teachers in the course, Stella felt reassured that her communication with her son's future teachers might be good. Stella said: "It's beautiful to see the next generation of teachers, and it also inspires a lot of confidence to know that they're having a class like this.".

The nursery parents: a distinct group. The parents who participated in this study were all women over the age of 30 and varied in terms of their national origin (Canadian, Israeli-

Canadian, Iraqi, and German), religious affiliation (none, Jewish, Muslim, Evangelic, and Christian), marital status (married and common-law), number of children (one, two, and three), and socioeconomic status (average and above average). However, they all had one thing in common: they were highly engaged in their children's education.

During the parent focus group, the nursery parents identified themselves as a distinct group, whose opinions are not representative of the general population. For example, Nina stated: "I don't think maybe we're [nursery parents] a *fair* representative of the general population", and "we're [nursery parents] not representative for sure.". Betty said: "some things that I [nursery parent] bring up feel a little bit like maybe they [pre-service teachers] are not gonna hear that from a lot of people". The comparison of nursery parents to mainstream parents also emerged as a topic in two of the individual interviews. As such, Betty explained that, when compared to "mainstream parents", whose children attend daycare full-time, nursery parents are more involved. As such, parents Be said: "we [nursery parents] invest time in this part of our children's early education", and "[mainstream parents] typically do just bring their kids to daycare, drop them off and say good-bye, they don't even go through the door". Furthermore, Nina pointed out that she chose to bring her children to Concordia's Observation Nursery because it worked with her values and who she was as a person. Therefore, it appears that the parents who chose to attend the nursery may have certain characteristics and values in common, which differentiates them from other parents in the community.

Additionally, by attending the nursery, these parents acquired the ability of thinking critically of the schooling system. This skill further differentiates the nursery parents from other parents. Indeed, Betty stated that mainstream parents "just fall into that system without thinking about it, [...] without saying "wait a minute, [...] could I start a conversation?", whereas nursery

parents learned to question the functioning of schools (e.g., maybe they [other parents] don't see that there is a different way cuz I [nursery parent] didn't"). Therefore, the views of the nursery parents that we represent in this study may not be characteristic of the views of "mainstream parents" and should be interpreted within the context of the study.

Nursery parents' perspectives on parent-teacher communication. In this section, I highlighted the unique perspectives on parent-teacher communication of each nursery parent, by addressing the topics that each parent brought up in their individual interview, mock parent-teacher interview, and some of the class discussions (see Appendix J for an overview of themes by data source for each parents). I also used my field notes and reflective journal in order to provide context and additional background information relevant to the parents' opinions.

Betty was the mother of a five-year-old boy who started attending the nursery four months prior to the beginning of the study. The nursery was the child's first daycare experience.

Betty has attended and participated in all the parent-teacher communication classes, by openly sharing her opinions and experiences. In one occasion, when Betty could not attend the weekly class, her husband did. Given this mother's high attendance and participation rates, the pre-service teachers were frequently exposed to her opinions. Betty felt comfortable talking to the pre-service teachers in the course because they were not "rigid in beliefs". Moreover, Betty appreciated the opportunity of addressing in class "things that [needed] to come up".

Parent-teacher relationships. Betty wished to have a close relationship with her son's teachers. She grew up in a small town where everyone knew one another, thus having a sense of community within the school was important to her. She certainly wanted to be part of her son's education and she envisioned doing so through teachers. She thus had a high appreciation for parent-teacher relationships. She believed that getting to know her son's teacher was an

important factor in developing a parent-teacher relationship. Betty believed that the teacher

should also put effort in building a relationship with the parents, in order to learn more about the

child at hand. However, she understood that teachers do not always have time to build a

relationship with all the parents.

Betty expressed her concerns about initiating communication with her child's future

teachers, since simply "getting through the [school] door" is a challenge. She believed that

parents have to "really aggressively pursue a relationship" with teachers in order to be involved

in their children's education. She stated that she was not an aggressive person who pushes for

something and she was worried that she might not be assertive enough to seek a parent-teacher

relationship:

> I don't know if I will be as aggressive as suggested. Like, I am not...I am not very
>
> aggressive that way. Like… if people don't wanna talk to me, I won't force them to talk
>
> to me, you know. But that may be something that I have to do.

Although Betty found it "bizarre" to have to put so much effort in building a relationship with a

teacher, she said she would still try and put in the effort, by volunteering and writing letters.

Concerns about school transition. Betty shared her concerns about her son's transition to

school. His attachment to her was very strong, which might make things difficult when she

would have to enroll him in a school. Betty said: "[I am] the thing he [son] revolves around", I'm

kind of [...] the universe", and "he is, wanted me to be there like ALL the time". The mother

wanted her son's future teachers to be aware that her son needs reassurance whenever he is

concerned or stressed. Betty stated: "his [son's] style seems like he likes to get to know people,

and then he's comfortable, right"). Her main goal was to make his transition to school a good

one, so that her son feels comfortable and can be more independent.

The school system as a barrier to parental engagement. Betty believed that parents are often excluded from their children's education, because "the institution doesn't really make space for" parent-teacher communication. Moreover, she found it strange that parents are not allowed in the classroom. Betty said: "it doesn't make much sense to me [parents not being allowed in schools]". "Parents are not seen as really very [...] essential to the process of school" and they "are [...] easily dismissed" by schools. She wanted to enroll her son in a school in which she also felt welcome, so that her son can feel comfortable and safe. As such, Betty said: "I don't like this idea of uhh, [my son] feeling like it's a place that I'm not welcomed". According to Betty, schools generally do not foster parental engagement. Betty said: "a lot of schools don't really foster that kinda thing [parental engagement]". For example, at a school she visited, she thought that the school treated parents as "tools" to increase school performance, and that their policies were too constraining. The school refused to allow her to have lunch with her son, which makes her think the school does not prioritize family connections.

Betty saw the school system as the main challenge to her son's school transition, saying that "most of my [...] dissatisfaction really comes more from the institutional level". In Betty's opinion, the system is stagnating and there is no flexibility in teaching styles: "school's a lot about rules and you gotta follow those rules". She was aware that it would be "difficult […] to try and change that kind of a structure", especially when it is just one parent or one teacher acting alone. Although Betty saw the rigidity of the school system as an important communication barrier, she knew that teachers are doing their best, on their end, to build a relationship with parents: "I do believe that a lot of the teachers […] still would have that kind of communication and kinda work on that kinda relationship".

Stella was the mother of a three and a half years-old boy, who started attending the nursery four months prior to the beginning of the study and continued attending it the following year. A couple of years prior to attending the nursery, the son had attended another daycare for a few weeks.

On several occasions, Stella pointed out to the researchers and to the pre-service teachers that her son had sleep apnea related to environmental toxins, which affected his energy levels. The mother expressed her concern with the impact that her child's exhaustion might have had on his social relationships with children and educators at the nursery.

The decision to keep son at home. Prior to joining the nursery, Stella enrolled her son in a daycare for several weeks, until the caretaker directly told her that her son looked "miserable" and suggested her to remove him. The mother was overwhelmed with the situation, because she had to go back to work or would lose her job. Adding to the financial challenge of keeping the son at home was the necessity to avoid leaving her partner alone with their infant son. Her partner, who had autism spectrum disorder, could not interpret their infant son's emotional signals – an issue that disappeared when the son started communicating needs verbally. Stella said: "he [partner] couldn't tell the difference between when A. [son] was laughing or crying". Encouraged by the support received from their "network of friends and [...] extended family and parents with kids the same age", she decided to remove her son from daycare. It was more beneficial for her family in the long run to stay at home with her son and get in temporary debt rather than keeping him in an environment where he would be unhappy. In the end, she was grateful that the caretaker was honest with her and recommended doing what was best for her child.

The parent-teacher relationship at the nursery. At the nursery, Stella's son felt immediately comfortable because the educators "were so smiley, and welcoming, and caaalm", which lessened the mother's worries for her son. If anything were to happen, the educators would contact her immediately. It alleviated her nervousness (e.g., "really lightens my worries") and gave her more time to focus on work. The relationship between her family and the nursery educators led her to realize "how essential it is" to the "learning and development" of a child to have trust between parents and teachers. Her family and her "have felt so welcome and comfortable" from the beginning, as the communication was "really direct and really comfortable and loving". It helped that the educators were "always very receptive" and that the parent-teacher communication at the nursery was "wonderful".

Concerns about school transition. Stella was apprehensive with regards to her son's transition to school. She was particularly concerned with her son's teacher-student and peer relationship, with school environment and the quality of teachers, and with the type of discipline practiced in schools.

Stella expressed concern about her son's relationships with future peers and teachers. As such, Stella worried that her son might be seen as different and picked on by both peers and teachers: "I worry a little bit about him getting bullied". Moreover, Stella worried that teachers might misinterpret her son's learning style and unfairly scold him, as this has happened to her as a student. She recalled that during her own childhood, one of her teachers would scold her because she was not paying attention in class, while in fact she was just under-stimulated:

> […] especially my kindergarten teacher, she's like 'Well, she's not listening', you know, 'she's going off and doing her own thing' and my mom was like 'Well, she can read and you're doing the alphabet, and she's bored', you know 'give her something else to do'.

Thus, Stella worried about school teachers misinterpreting her son's particular learning style and competencies:

> If he's stressed, he doesn't wanna learn, but when he is, or doesn't wanna engage, or he doesn't, you know he, but when he's so relaxed he just wants to try everything, and, you know, and he's so inspired. […] He has been reading fluently since the age of two and a half and has taught himself to read and play complex music but is still unable to dress himself, and he is easily startled by loud noises or fast movements and not inclined to join groups of kids in loud play.

Stella wants her son to have a school teacher that is "loving", "caring", and willing to accommodate her son's learning needs. The quality of the relationship between the teacher and her son is more important to her than her son's grades.

Stella also worried about which school to enroll her son in. She wanted her son to go to a diverse school. This mother grew up in a "very conservative ethnic minority community" and had little exposure to different cultures. She also had "quite extremely racist teachers". The prejudice demonstrated by her own teachers was "really, really toxic". Her teachers not only approved of students' discriminatory behaviors, they also encouraged students to behave in prejudiced ways: "not just sort of approval but the active encouragement [of students by teachers]". Thus, she had to "unlearn this sort of toxic... homogeneity" and she wishes her son never to have to go through the same school experience she did: "I have a lot of bitterness about that experience".

Because Stella has experienced and heard "horror stories about racist teachers […] extreme sexism, about homophobia, from, coming from teachers", she fears that her son may

witness a prejudiced teacher whose behavior is condoned by the school. Thus, the mother wants

for her son to be in a nurturing school that encourages curiosity.

Another school-related challenge that Stella anticipated was the type of discipline that the

education system reinforces. She saw her calm, collaborative parenting style (i.e., "never yelled

at", "never punished") as very different from the discipline that is used in the schools (i.e.,

"punishment", "being yelled at", "restrictive"):

> We don't use punishment at home and...uh...know that they don't use punishment in...at
>
> the nursery here, and I worry about putting him into a...school system where that's a
>
> regular practice. […] Like he [son] just won't even know what to do with that
>
> [punishment], he's never been yelled at, and he's never been punished.

Stella would not want to put her son in a school where "rules are more important" than the well-

being of children, but said that if it came down to that, she would have to prepare her son for

such challenges.

Despite her concerns about the transition to school, Stella believed she found a good

match for her son, at a school where the teachers seemed "really supportive", the students were

diverse, and the approach was "person-centered".

Susie. Mother to a four-year-old boy and a one-year-old girl, Susie enrolled her son at the

nursery four months prior to the beginning of the study, in order for him to become more

independent and create "his own universe". The mother had visited multiple daycares prior to the

nursery, but "none of them felt right". The nursery was thus her son's first daycare experience.

Susie was also a master's student and she found it difficult to make time to study with a baby and

a preschooler at home. Thus, Susie valued having time to herself when her son was at the

nursery. She did not appreciate when her son started imitating his groupmates by asking her to

stay with him at the nursery, whereas he initially did not feel the need to have her there: "he said because all the other moms are there. [...] it started to backfire.".

Susie attended approximately half of the classes, which means that the pre-service teachers in the parent-teacher communication course were less exposed to her opinions, as compared to the opinions of the nursery parents who attended class regularly. However, when she attended class, Susie enjoyed participating in elaborate discussions on the topic of cultural sensitivity. Susie showed concern with cultural and religious discrimination on multiple occasions, in class discussions, in the individual interview, and in mock parent-teacher interview.

Approach to education. Although different to her and her husband's style, Susie placed abundant confidence in the educators' creative approach to discipline and saw the educators' teaching efforts as an extension of what she already does at home. She loved the educator's "child-centered approach" and lenience. However, she found that too much lenience can lead to a lack of discipline, which would go against her parenting approach. Susie said: "discipline is definitely something that I, I do a lot of at home, so I'd like to see it carry over [at the nursery] a bit". Susie thought it was crucial for parents and teachers to adapt their educational approach to the child's personality and needs.

Moreover, this mother emphasised the importance of adults interacting with children in a respectful way. Susie valued her son's talkativeness and found it crucial that teachers respect her son by allowing him to express himself. This mother wants teachers to "see eye to eye" with her when it comes to her child's strengths and weaknesses, so that the child can be nurtured at school the same way that he is at home. Thus, Susie expected teachers to see her child's talkativeness as a strength and to encourage it "in a way that's constructive and beautiful". However, she also

wanted the teacher to "guide the child to be quiet in certain times" so that her son develops a balanced personality.

  Parent-teacher communication. Susie indicated that she wanted to have a personal and friendly relationship with her son's future teachers, which would allow her to engage in "open and honest communication…not only about the children, about other aspect of [hers] too". Susie said: "There definitely has to be like an openness [in the parent-teacher relationship], and no sense of like walls or guards or uhm...anything where the teacher is too protective of their space, cuz the space should be open.". It was also essential to Susie to be informed by the teacher about what goes on in class during the day and to be involved in any intervention that takes place. As such, Susie expressed that she wants the teachers to inform her of "the observations and the things that are worth noting" as well as "informal anecdotes about things that were said or done", "just to find out about...little things... that [she] missed on during the day". Not to imppeded on the teachers' end of shift, Susie suggested having weekly overviews of what happened in class in informal writing. Also, "if anything bad ever happens, [she wants] to feel like there is an intervention where [she is] involved".

  While Susie indubitably values open communication and having a parent-teacher partnership, she believed that teachers are generally not very open to parental engagement and that talking to "teachers would be like […] if [she were] invited to speak with the panel of experts". She thus thought that she might need to be more assertive in order to pursue a partnership with teachers. Participating in the parent-teacher communication course has empowered her to express her opinions with more confidence:

   I'm definitely […] a little bit more confident in terms of being able to assert myself. I'm

   still not there at 100%, I am still a very nice person. […] I am starting to really try to

teach myself to become a little bit more assertive. When things do bother me, I actually

talk about it and not let myself to...held back.

However, Susie expressed that she still felt that it would be a challenge to communicate her

concerns with teachers without being "that annoying mom", or "come[ing] off as intense".

Parents Ss said: "You get sensitive, it's your child, so…you don't wanna be too…you don't

wanna come off...seeming intimidating or upset", and "I don't say anything in the moment cuz I

don't wanna come off as too upset.". Therefore, Susie wishes for a partnership with her son's

teachers, but believes that because teachers are guarded, such a partnership would require

tremendous efforts on her part.

Concerns about school transition. Susie found that choosing the right school for her child

was challenging. She knew exactly what she wanted in a school to the point where it became

difficult to find one (e.g., "Maybe it's too specific"). This mother hoped to find a good, child-

centered school for her son. However, the mother believed it was rather rare to find such a

school, given the current educational system. She thought the school system was "like a factory"

that made "perfect citizens" and the main goal was to "condition children to be these [...]

indoctrinations".

Susie was appreciative of the information on various schools that she acquired from her

interactions with pre-service teachers and with other parents who had recent experience with

schools. This mother gained a better understanding of "what the education system can look like"

and felt less like a "deer in the headlights" when it came to her son's transition to school. After

her participation in the parent-teacher communication course, Susie also felt more confident

"there is a way [...] of integrating [parents'] wants and needs in the system".

Discrimination and cultural sensitivity. Susie expressed her concerns about potential discrimination and racism that her child might experience in school. This worry stemmed from her own and her husband's past experiences of discrimination from teachers (i.e., "teachers saying islamophobic things"). She believed that discrimination for Islamic people may be worse now than before. Following the Quebec City mosque shooting, Susie had to explain the events to her son. It was challenging for her, because she wanted to teach her son about race and discrimination without having him associate his religious identification with violence. Susie said: "I want it [the conversation about the mosque shooting] to be raceless". She believed that conversations about race are "important to have in the context of […] early childhood education" and that it is important to "plant the seeds of justice" early on: "[…] when do you plant the seeds of...equality, and...uhm...peace, you know? We plant them...in children". If she ever were to have a "vibe" from a teacher or an educator that they were judging her family based on their religion, she would not put her child in that kind of environment. Despite the negative world events and negative personal experiences, this mother has hope because the community of "people of color" is "very strong" and she feels a sense of togetherness.

Nina. This mother had been coming at the nursery for five years prior to the beginning of the study, as she registered her three boys (10, 7, and 3 years-old) to attend the nursery's program between the ages of three and five years-old. This mother was highly familiar with the nursery's philosophy, which fit in well with her personal values. She enjoyed participating weekly in the parent-teacher communication course, shared her opinions boldly, and took on an expert stance by leading the conversation with the pre-service teachers and ensuring that they learn the most from their interactions with the nursery parents.

Nina had experienced multiple educator transitions while at the nursery. She found the transitions quite hard at the beginning because she was not comfortable with the change in style from previous educators. However, she very much appreciated the openness of the new nursery educators, seeing as they were willing to hear the parents' points of view "and take from that, and grow", which she considered to be "really fabulous."

Nina's older sons were attending an alternative school, which she enjoyed talking about. In discussions with nursery parents, pre-service teachers, and researchers, Nina referred to parent-teacher communication at her sons' alternative school and openly shared her experiences there, bad and good.

Parent-teacher communication. Nina believed that what most facilitates parent-teacher communication in a non-judgmental way is the openness and acceptance of parental feedback on behalf of the teachers. She appreciated that the nursery educators were approachable and prepared to address her concerns: "in terms of the relationship part, the fact that they're [nursery educators] so open makes it easy for us to share, as parents".

This mother expects teachers to keep her informed of anything regarding her children as soon as possible. "Knowing what's going on" is important to her. Also, being informed of the teacher's plan is a "big thing". She enjoys when teachers take ownership and deal with an issue on their own, but would like to be informed of their plan before any action is taken: "I like when someone takes ownership, like the teacher takes ownership, but I still would like to be informed of what's going on". This would represent a way for the teacher to keep her involved in her child's education, so that they can work together towards the same goals:

You've [teacher] taken ownership in your own way by telling me what your action plan

is, you've communicated it to me, so that at least gives me a chance to kinda give you my

feedback if I have some to give. […] it's their [teachers'] way of keeping me involved.

Another crucial point for this parent is for the teachers to trust the parents in the same way they

expect to be trusted by the parents. Nina said: "I think that *trust*, you know, has to be there". This

parent finds that some of the major barriers to parental engagement are teachers' lack of

consideration towards the parents and lack of communication. Communication is important

because she cannot support her child if she is unaware of the curriculum stage in which they are.

Dislike of the school system. This mother felt strongly about the impact of the school

system on children. Nina said" "I just dislike school", "I don't like what school does to kids",

and "It [school] changes kids in a way that drives me nuts". She particularly disliked the

superficiality of interactions between classmates: "it's about the other kids, and the socialization

that occurs it's it's all ffffake". Nina believed that the only way to overcome the negative impact

of school and to make a positive difference in her children's school experience is by directly

"working the system", which is "*exhausting*".

Because she sees the limits of the school system, Nina chose a school that allowed her to

be highly engaged and make a difference. For example, at the alternative school attended by her

older kids, she was welcome in the classroom, which allowed her to understand what her

children's days at school were like. However, simply being present in school, without a strong

parent-teacher partnership, was not sufficient to make a positive difference in her son's

education. As such, at her sons' alternative school, Nina felt disregarded when she brought up

her son's speech issue and found there was a lack of "style", which delayed the teacher's response

to the speech issue by a year. Parents Na said: "I came in angry", and "I don't see help from the

school". She eventually took matters in her own hands and hired a speech therapist independently. She believed that her child salvaged his schoolyear thanks to her actions:

> So we really didn't lose a year because I took action, I kind of said, fine, you do what you want, but I'll do what I want to. And I would take him out of school to bring him to the speech therapist.

Therefore, Nina suggested that a parent-teacher partnership would ensure the best quality of education for her children.

While Nina appeared highly critical of the school system, she was still appreciative of teachers: "It's not about the teachers, I love the teachers at my kid's school". She explained to the pre-service teachers that sometimes, when parents appear mad toward the teacher, they may in fact be frustrated with the system: "they're [parents] gonna be aggressive maybe, but it's not about you [the teacher]".

Claire. This mother of two joined the nursery soon after the beginning of this study. She had recently moved to Canada and enrolled her four-and-a-half-year-old daughter into the nursery's program. Her daughter had previously attended a full-time daycare program for a couple of years, in a different country.

The mother attended the parent-teacher communication course regularly, with her 20-month-old son. Despite English not being her first language, Claire participated in class conversations and shared her opinions without hesitation.

Parent-teacher relationships. In our conversations on the topic of parent-teacher relationships, Claire referred back to her experiences at her daughter's previous daycare. The mother compared and drew multiple parallels between the nursery and the previous daycare.

Claire found the nursery and the previous daycare to be similar in values, in that both encouraged parent-teacher relationships.

At the nursery, Claire had a "very friendly and open" relationship with the educators, which she classified as "quite good". The quality of her relationships with the nursery educators and with the educators from the previous daycare has helped her see the benefits of a parent-teacher partnership. Now she sees teachers and school as less "abstract" and "more part of [her family's] life". Claire said: "The teachers or the day caregivers are also part of our life". In the past, a relationship with teachers "was not necessary" for her, but now it has become "very important", because "if you know [the teacher], you can, you can work on problems. Thus, when her children start attending school, she would like to have an honest, respectful, and harmonious relationship with her children's teacher. To make such a parent-teacher relationship possible, parent Ca expects her children' future teachers to be "friendly" to her and her children, "open to new ideas", "really motivated", and competent: "I don't wanna have teachers who's not competent, who don't know what they're doing", "I want to have a very qualified person".

Parent-teacher communication. In the future, this mother would like to have open communication with school teachers, so that she can stay informed and voice her concerns when issues arise: "if I have some concerns, I want to have somebody to talk to". As such, she would like to have a daily, "short, one minute, to talk with the teachers", and a monthly report, "to know more" about what goes on in the classroom. Also, she finds that it is important to have a long, one-on-one meeting with the teacher twice a year, where she can share her insights, because deeper conversations "can't happen if you only have 5 minutes". Moreover, she finds it particularly important that the teachers inform her in advance of their plans, rather than just

informing her of events after the fact: […] what they [teachers] are planning. This is also important to have the plannings".

Parental engagement. Claire trusts teachers to do their job well and plans to intervene only when problems arise. Claire said: "I don't want to control the teacher. They should do what they want", and "I trust caregivers too, that they do good work and...at least until there's a problem". As such, if she feels that there is a "very big issue", she would want to "have a personal [face-to-face] talk" and "meet [the teacher] somewhere outside". Claire said: "cuz I, I'm really concerned, I would like to talk personally", "not via email, because I don't like". If talking to the teachers does bring results, she would be ready to address the parent board, or the school directly: "So, I would like to say it [the issue] tooo, to, say uh, say to the teachers, and then afterwards if there's no reaction or nothing I would like to attend to the school, or parent board to discuss it with the other problems and to have like…more a wider discussion".

Summary of the perspectives of the nursery parents, as a group. Each of the nursery parents in this study had unique experiences and unique opinions of what parent-teacher communication and relationships should look like. Some parents valued close, personal relationships with the teachers, whereas others were satisfied with a more professional relationship based on openness and trust. Regardless of the familiarity level expected in their parent-teacher interactions, all parents agreed that ongoing communication was essential to the process of forming a parent-child partnership, and that having a parent-teacher partnership was important to the learning and development of their children.

Parent-teachers communication and parental engagement. In building a parent-teacher partnership, all parents wished for the teachers to initiate and maintain communication by keeping them informed of what goes on in the classroom. Some of the parents also emphasized

that it was essential to them to be informed in advance of the teachers' plans and included in any

intervention plan concerning their children. Therefore, all the nursery parents desired to be

engaged in their children's education. However, multiple parents perceived parental engagement

as a challenge, due to a power imbalance in the parent-teacher relationship and to systemic

challenges. As such, Susie spoke of how she felt that teachers outside of the nursery tend to

adopt an expert stance in discussions with parents and are generally not open to parent' opinions.

Susie struggled with the thought that she would have to become more assertive in order to get

her point across to teachers and to have a say in her children's education. Similarly, Betty felt

that the school system excludes parents from their children's education. She believed that in

order to be engaged in her son's education, she would have to "really aggressively pursue a

relationship" with the teachers, which was not in her character. Nina also felt that in order to

participate in her children's education, she had to "work the system", which she found

"*ehxausting*". She thus highlighted that by keeping her informed, teachers can enable her to

participate in her children's education.

All the nursery parents expressed their satisfaction with the welcoming atmosphere, the

open parent-educator communication, and the friendliness and professionalism of the educators

at the nursery. Consequently, all parents hoped to have similar interactions with school teachers

in the future. Betty hoped to find a school for her son that would have a similar community

feeling to the nursery's, Claire wished for children's future teachers to be friendly to her and her

children and "open to new ideas", Stella prioritized finding a school with an equally welcoming

atmosphere, whereas Susie wished for her son's teachers to be open to her feedback.

School transition is a topic that the parents brought up frequently. For four out of five

parents, their child's school transition was going to be the first school transition that they would

ever experience as a parent. Understandably, these parents showed concern with the child's

upcoming school transition. Most parents showed concern with their child's comfort level in the

new environment and wanted to ensure that their child is well cared for, treated fairly, and

respected. As such, Betty wanted teachers to reassure her son when he is stressed, Stella wanted

to find a school where the well-being of children is prioritized over following rules, and Susie

wanted a child-centered environment where her son would be treated with respect by teachers.

Some of the parents also showed concern with the possibility of their children facing

discrimination from teachers and peers. As such, Stella feared that her son may encounter

prejudiced teachers whose behavior is condoned by the school, and Susie feared that her son may

encounter racism and religious discrimination in school. Additionally, Stella expressed concern

with peer relationships and teacher-student relationships. More specifically, she feared that her

son might be teased by peers and unfairly scolded by teachers for his particular learning style.

Overall, the nursery parents appeared to be a group of highly engaged parents, who

valued parent-teacher partnerships and wished to support and advocate for their children during

the school transition.

The impact of the nursery and the course on parent's views. In this section, I

analyzed how the studied context influenced parent's views on education and on parent-teacher

communication (i.e., second research question). The context set by the nursery's daycare

program and educators, and the parent-teacher communication course, is unique. This context

allowed nursery parents to share, discuss, and reflect on their perspectives on the topic of parent-

teacher communication, during unstructured conversations with the educators and/or other

parents who shared similar values, as well as during structured class discussions with pre-service

teachers, who were learning about the topic.

In order to determine the influence of the nursery environment and the course participation on parents' perspectives, I relied on instances from the individual interviews when parents directly expressed the impact of the nursery's context on them. Even though the time that the participating parents spent at the nursery varied from five years to one month, each of the five parents discussed how their experiences at the nursery and in the course has influenced them in different ways.

Change in parenting methods. Some of the nursery parents reported that their interactions with the nursery educators had a positive impact on their parenting and their mother-child relationship. As such, Betty said that after her son joined the nursery, she changed how she interacted with her son and introduced new activities. Betty adopted the educators' style and became more interactive during reading time with her son. More specifically, Betty reported asking more questions while reading, to ignite her son's curiosity. Moreover, Betty started bringing activities from the nursery into her home. For example, after an activity at the nursery that consisted of planting beans, she and her son have planted beans in their backyard.

Similarly, Claire, who had only recently joined the nursery, said that her newly formed relationship with the nursery educators has helped her improve her parenting style and do more creative activities at home. Thanks to the educators being accessible and open-minded, she felt that she could come to them with her concerns and parenting struggles. Claire said: "I can come with my concerns", "they [educators] understand and they're…uhm…trying to answer, quickly and give me some solutions", and "I have a chance to talk to them every time...while I'm here". By discussing her parenting struggles with the educators, Claire became aware of new parenting strategies. Claire said: "they [educators] can encourage you to do more or to try this solution or to try this way". Also, the activities that she did at home with her children have changed, as they

"are doing more and more creative [activities], things like painting". Most importantly, Claire learned from the nursery educators to adopt a "more relaxed", "not so restricted" mindset by allowing her children to play independently and to get dirty on occasion. Claire was proud of her new parenting style and happy to see that it had a positive influence on her children: "I'm really good in this and I'm proud of it". Her children became "also more relaxed", "more self-confident", and "creative".

Equally, Nina expressed that, through the nursery's teachings, she learnt to give her children more control at home, by providing a few choices. Nina found this technique to be "a life saver". However, when asked about the impact of the nursery on her parenting, Nina indicated that her parenting was not influenced by it, but rather that she chose a daycare that fit in with her parenting. Nevertheless, it seems that, in her five years of experience at the nursery, Nina integrating at least one new techniques into her parenting, namely choice giving.

Change in perspective. Multiple parents indicated that their participation in the course has influenced their perspectives on parent-teacher communication. Indeed, Betty indicated that the class discussions have shaped her perspective on how parent-teacher communication ought to be and encouraged her to play an active role in pursuing parent-teacher relationships in the future. Per se, the communication course "opened [her] mind" about how parents can be more involved in their children's education. Furthermore, in class, Betty learned of the parent teacher-student triangle concept (i.e., parents and teachers working together to ensure the child's success), which changed her understanding of parent-teacher relationships and empowered her to be involved in her son's schooling. Additionally, Betty said that her relationships with the pre-services teachers in the course have helped her pierce through the wall of formality and see

teachers as persons, who have their own lives outside of school: "they were students once", "they have lives".

Equally, Susie reported to me that the parent-teacher communication course has empowered her to express her opinions with more confidence and helped her understand that her concerns are valid and worth being brought up with her son's teachers. However, Susie said that she still felt that it would be a challenge to communicate her concerns with teachers without coming across as "that annoying mom", or "come[ing] off as intense":

On a similar note, Stella discussed how the relationship between her family and the nursery educators led her to realize "how essential it is" to the "learning and development" of a child to have trust between parents and teachers.

Overall, the nursery parents were influenced by the context studied in two ways: through the educators, who constituted an example of successful parent-teacher interactions and a useful source of parenting tips, and through the course's teachings and parent-pre-service teacher interactions within the course, which empowered them to actively seek to form a partnership with their children's teachers.

Part II: The Pre-service Teachers

The parent-teacher communication course as the research context. The main researchers of this study were also the teachers for the parent-teacher communication course. As such, I was the teaching assistant and my supervisor was the instructor. While this dual-role may have led some pre-service teachers to occasionally give socially desirable answers, they also allowed us to collect data discreetly, without interfering with the course's normal functioning. The data that I collected for this study from pre-service teachers came from class activities and course assignments that were included in the course's outline. The participating pre-service

teachers did not have to engage in any extra work or discussions as compared to the non-participating pre-service teachers. As such, the initial and subsequent open-ended questionnaires designed to learn the pre-service teacher's perspectives on parent-teacher interactions were integrated in the course as in-class activities. The course instructor led the recorded focus groups and facilitated the recorded class discussion the same way that she led all other lectures. I was present during every class as well, as required by my teaching assistant role. Therefore, my presence in the classroom as a researcher was discreet. Moreover, the data collection was timed in keeping with the textbook readings and lectures, such that the questions asked in the class discussions, focus groups, and questionnaires were directly relevant to the course material covered during the class when they occurred. Overall, we made efforts to collect data as discreetly as possible, without interfering with the course, in order to capture the pre-service teachers' natural learning process.

The participating pre-service teachers. Fourteen out of the 19 participating pre-service teachers filled in the demographic sheet. To provide a more comprehensive description of the participating pre-service teachers from the parent-teacher communication course, I also relied on information from my field notes.

All the participating pre-service teachers were female. The majority of the pre-service teachers were under the age of 25, unmarried, and without children. Out of the 19 pre-service teachers in the course, only two were over the age of thirty, and both had children.

Eleven out of the fourteen pre-service teacher that filled in the demographic sheet indicated their national origin to be "Canadian", their religion "Christian", and their socioeconomic status to be above average. Only one out of 14 pre-service teachers did not identify herself as Caucasian. Arguably, the group of pre-service teachers who participated in

this study had, for the most part, a homogeneous composition, consisting of childless, Christian, white Canadian females, with an above average socioeconomic status.

The pre-service teachers were either in their second or third year of a four-year program. While a handful of pre-service teachers had some teaching-related experience acquired previous to their enrollment in the parent-teacher communication course, either from a stage or a job, the majority of pre-service teachers had none. Consequently, most of the pre-service teachers in this study have had limited opportunities for interactions with parents prior to this course.

The evolution of pre-service teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher communication. To identify how pre-service teacher's perspectives of parent-teacher communication changed following their participation in the course (i.e., third research question), I integrated and analyzed three distinct data sources: (1) pre-service teachers' initial and final questionnaires, (2) pre-service teachers' initial and final focus groups, and (3) pre-service teachers' initial and final reflective responses. The themes that emerged from each data source can be found in Appendix K. I also referred to my field notes and reflective journal for context.

In this section, I focused on comparing the themes that the pre-service teachers brought up at the beginning and at the end of the course, rather than on their specific opinions at one point or another during the course. Such a comparison allowed me to capture the pre-service teachers' initial and subsequent understanding of parent-teacher communication. In my interpretation of the evolution of pre-service teachers' perspectives, I also considered the opinions shared by the nursery parents in the classroom,

From personal schooling experiences to nursery parents' experiences. The regular, weekly interactions between pre-service-teachers and parents appeared to have been a worthwhile experience for the pre-service teachers in this study, who had limited opportunities

for parental interaction outside of the course. Also, the pre-service teachers were required to observe weekly the interactions between the nursery parents and the nursery educators and between nursery educators and nursery parents' children. These observations provided important contextual information to the pre-service teachers, which allowed them to better interpret the experiences shared by the nursery parents in the classroom. Consequently, the pre-service teachers' observations and discussions with the nursery parents became a reference point in their exploration of the parent-teacher communication course material.

In their initial discussion on parent-teacher interactions (i.e., focus group one), the pre-service teachers referred frequently to their school experience as students, who noticed interactions between their parents and their teachers. This may be due to their limited professional experience with parental communication. The big majority of pre-service teachers brought up their experiences as children (e.g., "I [as a child] felt super supported because they [parents and teacher] were always on the same page"; "I would every night have to […] sit with my parents for five hours [to do homework]"; "my parents went up to the teacher[…]and then that's when my teacher asked me what I wanted"). The few pre-service teachers who had children brought up their experiences as mothers interacting with their children's teachers (e.g., "when you go and you drop off your child at school […] they [teachers] don't even say hi or go to you").

In their subsequent discussion on parent-teacher interactions (focus group two), the pre-service teachers referred mainly to their discussions with nursery parents. In their discussion of diversity in the classroom, pre-service teachers referred to the experiences and opinions shared in class by some of the nursery parents. As such, some of the pre-service teachers noticed and brought up the nursery parents' cultural awareness (e.g., "she's [a nursery parent] careful with the

way she describes people in front of her children"; "she doesn't wanna label people in front of her child already.") and the nursery parents' concerns with peer acceptance in a diverse classroom (e.g., "she [nursery mom] doesn't want that [the child's diversity], uhm... to be seen as a difference"). Some of the pre-service teachers further reflected on how the background of the family, a child's personality traits, and the child's "mannerisms and different ways to communicate", may influence peer interactions and lead to either acceptance or rejections. Therefore, by the end of the course, some of the pre-service teachers were able to draw on teachings form class discussion with the nursery parents, instead of relying on their personal student or parental experiences with parent-teacher interactions.

Deeper, more specific discussions. The parent-teacher communication course has helped some pre-service teachers acquire a deeper understanding of parental engagement, parent-teacher communication, parent-teacher relationships, and good teaching, as evidenced by the increase in specificity when addressing the topics in the beginning of the course, as compared to at the end of the course.

Parental engagement. Most of the pre-service teacher's views of parental engagement were altered by their weekly interactions with the nursery parents. While in the beginning of the course (i.e., initial focus group and initial questionnaire) the pre-service teacher brought up frequently parental help at home while discussing parental engagement, by the end of the course (i.e., subsequent focus group and subsequent questionnaire), the pre-service teachers spoke more often of parental presence and help at school. Indeed, the nursery parents, who were highly engaged at the nursery, valued being physically present in the classroom. This value was transmitted to the pre-service teachers, as by the end of the course, the pre-service teachers indicated that their top expectation for parental engagement was parental presence and help at

school. Therefore, the pre-service teachers' initial expectation for parental engagement at home was subsequently replaced with an expectation of parental engagement at school, which is in accordance with the values of the nursery parents with whom the pre-service teachers interacted.

Moreover, most of the pre-service teacher's initial views on parental engagement consisted of simply acknowledging the unavoidability of having to include parents in the education of their children, sooner or later. For example, one pre-service teacher said: "I don't find it can work that way [by excluding the parent] all the time"). Overall, the discussion on the topic during the first focus group was shorter and less elaborated, which suggests that pre-service teachers had a limited understanding of parental engagement. In the second focus group, most of the pre-service teachers engaged in elaborate discussions on parental engagement, in which they considered the different types of parental engagement and of the diversity in parents' preferences for engagement. As such, in the second focus group, some of the pre-service teachers highlighted that "there are other ways for parents to be involved", which are "as meaningful" as helping at home. Some of the pre-service teachers then went on to give diverse examples of parental engagement, such as volunteering at school (e.g., "maybe there's a parent who wants to...always volunteer and come in) and online presence (e.g., "then you might just have a parent, who is still involved, but, maybe online). One of the pre-service teachers believed that teachers should "just have to ask the parents individually what they want" and should provide parents with multiple options for engagement.

This elaborate discussion that occurred during the second focus group stands in sharp contrast with the one from the first focus group, when most of the pre-service teachers appeared motivated to engage with parents as a means to extend their teachings to children's home environment: "once you get parents involved, they can bring that home, the literacy and reading

can continue at home"; "biggest goal is to bring what goes on in those reading circles…um into the home". Therefore, toward the end of the course, most of the pre-service teachers were more aware of diverse types of parental engagement and more willing to consider ways of accommodating parents in order to facilitate their engagement.

Barriers to parental engagement. Some of the pre-service teachers demonstrated deeper reflection than before, by spontaneously considering the impact of teachers' attitudes on parental engagement in the second focus group. As such, some pre-service teachers explained that because teachers can be intimidated by the presence of parents in school, they may expect parents to be engaged in "really specific" ways, such, as thorough homework help. Pre-service teacher 1 said:

> Teachers become a little bit... uhm... how do you say that, like intimidated... so they have these expectations for parents... but this all goes on at home, it's homework help, it's this it's that, but, never in the classroom never in my territory.

By looking inward and reflecting on the teacher's role in parental engagement, some pre-service teachers demonstrated that they understood the complex interrelations between parental engagement, parent-teacher communication, and parent-teacher relationships.

Adding to the newly acquired understanding of a teacher's role in parental engagement, some pre-service teachers also demonstrated a new consideration of systemic challenges to parent-teacher communication. As such, in their discussion of barriers to parent-teacher communication that occurred during the second focus group, most of the pre-service teachers focused their conversation on communication errors that may occur due to the fact that schools do not permit having frequent face-to-face conversations between parents and teachers. For example, pre-service teacher 2 said: "You [teacher] can't like physically talk with the parent I

find it really hard to explain you know, your objectives, why you're doing things". Furthermore, other pre-service teachers emphasized that "it's difficult getting families into schools now because the schools don't want them in" (i.e., "the parents aren't allowed to be in the yard with them [children] in the morning"). Some pre-service teachers appeared somewhat discouraged when faced with the challenge of building parent-teacher relationships within a schooling system whose structure does not welcome parents. As such, pre-service teacher 3 said:

> The whole school system…doesn't want them [parents] in, so just being a teacher saying like "yeah I want the parents in […] but like as an individual teacher it might be difficult to say like "no I want them in, the school doesn't want them in.

Nonetheless, one pre-service teacher said that "there can DEFINITELY be that awesome partnership with the parents that are open-minded and the teacher that's open-minded". Another pre-service teachers believed that by "understanding the [child's] family situation" and "being respectful towards that [family situation], accommodating", teachers can facilitate the formation of a parent-teacher partnership.

Overall, some pre-service teachers became aware of the impact that teachers' attitudes and the school system may have on parental engagement. Moreover, some pre-service teachers showed a sense of responsibility in creating a partnership with parents. in order to overcome these barriers to parental engagement.

Barriers to parent-teacher communication. Most of the pre-service teachers consistently mentioned parent-teacher communication as an essential part of parental engagement, from the beginning to the end of the course. However, in the questionnaire at the end of the course, some of them showed a new awareness of the potential barriers preventing parents from communicating with teachers. In their efforts to identify barriers to parental engagement, most of

the pre-service teachers constantly brought up cultural, linguistics, and economical diversity in the first and in the second questionnaire. However, more pre-service teachers brought up the parents' lifestyle (i.e., busy work and home context) in the second questionnaire than in the first one, indicating that more students became aware of more lifestyle related struggles that parents may face. Indeed, the parent lifestyle theme became more differentiated by the end of the course, as most of the pre-service teachers became more specific in their identification of barriers. For example, at the beginning of the course, some of the pre-service teachers identified a "medical" barrier, which at the end of the course appeared divided up in more specific sub-categories illustrating possible medical conditions, such as "illness", "addiction", and "pregnancy". This transition from identifying general barriers to naming specific barriers to parental engagement suggests that, by the end of the course, some of the pre-service teachers deepened their understanding of parental barriers to parent-teacher communication by perceiving the barriers as less of an abstract concept and more of a reality that different parents may face.

Parent-teacher relationships. Some of the pre-service teachers demonstrated a similar increase in specificity when discussing the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships. As such, in the questionnaire at the beginning of the course, the pre-service teachers frequently mentioned that parents may experience "unease opening up to teachers". Whereas at the end of the course, some of the pre-service teachers were able to identify the specific sources of potential unease of parents, such as "conflict" and "disagreements with either the teacher or school" and "fear of overstepping the teacher's authority". The differentiation shown here demonstrates that some pre-service teachers gained insights into parents' points of view, which led to a more refined understanding of the dynamics in parent-teacher relationships.

Furthermore, in the first questionnaire, 8 out of 14 of the pre-service considered developing a relationship of trust and understanding with the parent to be a priority. However, by the end of the course, all of the participating pre-service teachers indicated that developing a relationship of trust and understanding with the parent was essential. Similarly, in the first focus groups, most of the pre-service teachers discussed parent-teacher relationships at an abstract level, using broad statements such as "you [the teacher] want to have a partnership into educating their [the parent's] child" and "partnership, communication…having it, it's, it's key", whereas in the second group some of the pre-service teachers were able to articulate both the importance and the challenges of parent-teacher relationships. For example, pre-service teacher 4 said:

> So everything you [as the teacher] do you should be like, 'here's what I'm doing, this is exactly the steps that we're taking and here is why'. If it's just 'well we're doing it just because'...your, the parents have, have a right to know exactly why.

Therefore, we can argue that the parent-teacher communication course has helped most pre-service teachers grasp the importance of a strong parent-teacher relationship.

Good teaching. Some pre-service teachers displayed in their answers to the second questionnaire a deeper understanding of what constitutes good teaching and of what a teacher's responsibilities are toward students and families, as compared to their answers in the first questionnaire. I compared the initial and subsequent answers and found that the pre-service teachers frequently and consistently brought up the following themes: (1) offering care and support to students, (2) teaching style, (3) students' academic success, and (4) including parents. Despite the overall consistency in themes, there was a change in most of the pre-service teacher's understanding of student academic success. As such, when writing about good teaching at the beginning of the course, the pre-service teachers brought up most frequently student academic

success, whereas at the end of the course, they brought up most frequently teaching skills (i.e.,

knowledge, continuous learning) (see Appendix L for a complete list of the themes that emerged

from each questionnaire and their frequencies). Therefore, by shifting their attention away from

children's academic success and toward their own skills, some of the pre-service teachers

demonstrated an increased awareness of the complex dynamics that influence children's

academic success.

In the second questionnaire, the pre-service teachers still brought up student academic

success frequently. However, the theme emerged only in relation to teacher's responsibilities

toward students and families, suggesting that most pre-service teachers still considered student

academic success important, but they had changed their understanding of it.

Moreover, by the end of the course, communication with parents and accessibility toward

parents emerged as new themes in relation to good teaching, indicating that some of the pre-

service teachers had expanded their subsequent definition of good teaching beyond just student

academic success. Therefore, by the end of the course, some of the pre-service teachers

expanded their subsequent definition of good teaching and showed an increased awareness of the

multitude of variables that influence student academic success.

New focus on self-improvement. By the end of the course, some pre-service teachers

showed a shift in concern from discomfort, to self-improvement in parental interactions, and an

increased sense of agency over their ability to improve their teaching.

Teachers' responsibilities toward students and families. In the first questionnaire, most of

the pre-service teachers often brought up the teachers' personal characteristics (i.e., passionate,

open-minded, inviting) in relation to a teacher's responsibility toward students and their families.

By the end of the course, many of the pre-service teachers replaced their emphasis on personal

characteristics with an emphasis on respect for diversity (i.e., open and accepting of diverse families, curriculum based on each family's principles, etc.). Thus, the initial self-centered focus displayed by some pre-service teacher was replaced by a focus on creating an inclusive environment for children and their families, suggesting that these pre-service teachers learned to perceive good teaching as dependent on their efforts to create an inclusive environment in their classroom, rather than dependent on innate personal characteristics. Therefore, by the end of the course, the pre-service teachers deepened their understanding of what constitutes good teaching and demonstrated increased agency over their ability to improve their teaching.

Parent-teacher Interactions. Some of the pre-service teachers displayed in their written assignments an increased ability to problem-solve through reflection, as evidenced by an increased focus on self-awareness and self-improvement.

The pre-service teachers wrote two reflective answers in the first half of the course (i.e., in January and in February, in a course that lasted from January to April), on topics that they chose freely from the chapters in the course manual (i.e., each chapter had multiple reflective topics suggested). Regardless of the topic of the reflective response, the pre-service teachers were expected to reflect on themselves, show awareness of their views of diversity, and refer to their future teaching.

A comparison of the topics selected by pre-service teachers in the first versus the second set of reflective responses indicated that some pre-service teachers experienced a change in perspective when it came to parent-teacher communication and interactions with families. As such, in the first set of reflective responses, 41% (i.e., 7 out of 17) of the pre-service teachers demonstrated concern with working with diverse families, by choosing to reflect on which families they would feel uncomfortable working with as teachers and why. For example, some of

the pre-service teachers indicated in their reflective responses that they would feel uncomfortable interacting with single parents who are isolated from extended families, or with mothers who choose to work instead of staying home with the kids, despite not needing to work for financial reasons. Regardless of the type of family that made them uncomfortable, these pre-service teachers identified the source of their discomfort to be a clash of values and a lack of knowledge with regards to the family's situation. In contrast, in the second set of reflective responses, 44% (i.e., 7 out of 16) of the pre-service teachers chose to reflect on the impact that their personal tendencies, values, and skills may have on their future interactions with parents. For example, some pre-service teachers reflected on their communication style and tendencies in social interactions, their attitudes and teaching philosophy, or on their ability to take the parent's perspective to improve communication skills. Therefore, the pre-service teachers' concerns shifted from a focus on discomfort in parental interactions to a focus on self-improvement in parental interactions. This shift in focus suggests that the course has provided some of the pre-service teachers with the confidence and knowledge necessary to work on improving their social and communication skills in parental interactions.

Summary of the impact that the parent-teacher communication course had on the pre-service teachers' perspectives. Overall, my comparison of themes that emerged from various data sources obtained at different times during the course suggests that the course influenced some pre-service teachers' views of parent-teacher communication and parental engagement. As such, the parent-teacher communication course had a positive impact on some of the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards parent-teacher communication, on their understanding of parent-teacher communication and of good teaching, and on their sense of agency in parent-teacher communication.

Change in attitude towards parent-teacher communication. Hearing the parents' opinions during class discussions has helped most of the pre-service teachers gain insights into parents' perspectives and become aware of the daily struggles that parents face. Such insights led pre-service teachers to show an increased willingness to accommodate parents and to focus on the impact that their attitude may have on parent-teacher communication. The pre-service teachers also showed a newly acquired awareness of the role that systemic challenges (i.e., restricted access of parents on school grounds, limited opportunities for face-to-face parent-teacher interactions, etc.) play in parent-teacher communication, which suggests that the pre-service teachers acquired a more refined understanding of the complex dynamics of parent-teacher relationships.

Deeper understanding. Throughout the parent-teacher communication course, the pre-service teachers have deepened their understanding of parent-teacher communication, as evidenced by their ability at the end of the course to discuss the topic with increased specificity and examples from class discussions with the nursery parents. The pre-service teachers' understanding of what constitutes good teaching has also advanced from the beginning to the end of the course. As such, the pre-service teachers understood at the end of the course that good teaching goes beyond the academic success of students, and that a good teacher engages in the continuous development of their professional skills and includes parents in their children's education.

Increased sense of agency. The parent-teacher communication course has helped some of the pre-service teachers see teaching and parent-teacher relationship in a new light, increasing their sense of agency in becoming good teachers and in creating a partnership with parents. Many of the pre-service teachers showed an initial concern with the discomfort brought by

parental interactions, which was later replaced by a concern with the success of parent-teacher interactions. Similarly, some pre-service teachers demonstrated an initial self-centered view of good teaching, which was later replaced by a family-centered view (i.e., creating an inclusive environment for all families). This shift in focus indicates that pre-service teachers gained confidence in their own ability to improve as teachers and to engage in successful interactions with parents.

The impact of the course on pre-service teachers' perceived preparedness for parental interaction. To establish the impact of the parent-teacher communication course on the pre-service teachers' preparedness for working with families (i.e., fourth research question), I analyzed a class discussion with parents on diversity, as well as the changes in the pre-service teachers' answers to the first and the subsequent questionnaires.

Group problem-solving. Towards the end of the course, some of the pre-service teachers spontaneously brought up an imaginary case study of multiculturalism in the classroom and engaged in group analysis. These pre-service teachers displayed the ability to reflect on and solve challenges that may arise when interacting with diverse parents.

Three months into the four-month parent-teacher communication course, I recorded a class discussion between parents and pre-service teachers on the topic of diversity. Both the nursery parents and the pre-service teachers agreed that cultural diversity is a sensitive topic inside and outside of the classroom especially in Montreal's multicultural environment. To illustrate the challenges posed by multiculturalism, one pre-service teacher shared her experience as a child in school:

When they asked for like the [primary] language, like I don't, I don't have a primary

language" […] Even as a kid, they would ask me to write that and you know, anytime

that like I don't know. I'd have to ask them out 'What do I do, what do I write?'

Furthermore, some of the pre-service teachers shared with the nursery parents some of the

challenges related to teaching about diversity and representing cultures accurately in the

classroom. As such, pre-service teacher 5 said:

And I think like as a teacher, you need to be... and especially like I'm thinking of myself.

Like I can't represent many cultures and if I wanna like have a anti-bias classroom, I...

can't be an advocate, so I have to be really careful and how I represent things and be

really mindful. Umm, and I need to do the research... because there's so many, it's, it's

very easy, to like slip into appropriation, slip into... all these [...].

Also, pre-service teacher 6 said: "Not only does the child have to have a meaningful experience

[of the culture introduced], the teacher has to really like acknowledge and learn about what

they're teaching". To illustrate diversity challenges that may occur in a classroom, one pre-

service teacher recalled the example of childhood school friend, who was a Jehovah's witness.

The pre-service teacher explained that Jehovah's witnesses "don't do any holidays, no birthdays

not Halloween, not this, not that" and then described the Jehovah's witness friend as being

"kinda really difficult" in the classroom (i.e., "because, you know, it was to a point where she

[Jehova's witness classmate] couldn't read books about Halloween", "She [Jehovah's witness

classmate] couldn't read Harry Potter, she couldn't do this").

Building on the example of the Jehovah's witness school friend described above, a few

pre-service teachers spontaneously imagined a case scenario and engaged in group problem-

solving to identify the best way of addressing the diversity challenges described in their case

scenario. The pre-service teachers imagined themselves as the imaginary child's teachers and imagined that the values held by the child's parents would be in direct opposition with their core beliefs as teachers. Together, they dissected the challenge of engaging in parent-teacher conversations with the imaginary child's parents. For example, pre-service teacher 7 stated:

> Like I [a pre-service teacher] look at it for myself, and I think as a teacher, I need to be true to my practice and to my beliefs. And anti-bias curriculum and you know…trying to be as open as possible is something that I find is a core belief and I think it's...like, obviously you're going to have to negotiate with that. With...the parents, because you have to respect them because... it's their children. But I also, like... would find, I would have a really difficult time putting my beliefs on teaching my views on... like my core beliefs aside.

Moreover, the pre-service teachers reflected on the challenge of having to balance the inclusion of all students in cultural lessons with respecting the beliefs parents who do not want their children to learn about other cultures. As such, pre-service teacher 8 said:

> So you know, like, yes my view is about inclusivity but... maybe, like we [teachers] would also need to include this student who is Jehovah's witness and who is, we need to find different ways. So maybe... like this year I have a child who is Jehovah's witness. Umm maybe we focus more on Fall than Halloween. We still have talk about Halloween but we focus more on the Fall aspect.

This spontaneous analysis of an imagined case study establishes the pre-service teachers' ability to foresee challenges that may arise in multicultural classrooms and their ability to reflect on and find solutions to diversity-related parent-teacher communication challenges. Therefore, we can

advance that the parent-teacher communication course has improved the pre-service teachers'

preparedness for parental interaction in their future teaching career.

   Perceived preparedness. In the first and the second questionnaires, the pre-service

teachers were asked: "At this time, do you feel prepared to communicate and interact with

families? Explain why". I compared the pre-service teachers' initial answer to the question

above, to their subsequent answer given on the last day of classes, in order to determine how the

course impacted their feeling of preparedness for parental interaction.

   At the beginning of the course, seven out of 14 students indicated that they felt prepared

for interacting with parents. Three out of the seven brought up their previous experience with

parental interaction, either from stage or from work as educators, or fitness teachers/coaches, in

order to justify their preparedness for parental interaction. Another two out of seven pre-service

teachers who felt confident in their communication skills in the initial questionnaire indicated

that their interactions with the nursery parents had in the first three weeks of the course have

helped them feel prepared for parental interaction. As such, pre-service teacher 9 wrote: "Yes, it

has been an amazing experience having the parents come into the classroom and I have gained

confidence with our discussions and what I've learned so far to communicate and interact with

families.". Also, pre-service teacher 10 wrote: "I have learned now the importance of a parent-

teacher relationship. Therefore, I feel ready to communicate as I know how important and

beneficial to my teaching it will be.". Indeed, two other pre-service teachers who felt somewhat

prepared for parental interaction at the time of the initial questionnaire also brought up the

impact of the course on their feeling of preparedness. For example, wrote pre-service teacher 11:

   I feel more prepared than at the beginning of the course, but I still have some way to go.

   Communicating with the parents in the classroom has helped me to see how much parents

valued a good relationship with their child's teacher. This makes me feel more

comfortable because I will not feel as though I am overstepping.

On the one hand, these statements suggest that bringing parents into the classroom is a powerful

learning tool that has a strong and quick impact on some pre-service teachers. On the other hand,

these statements point out a methodological issue in the timing of the first questionnaire. As

such, the initial questionnaire was provided on the fourth week of classes, and by then the course

had already had an impact on some of the pre-service teachers' feeling of preparedness. The

initial questionnaire could not be given sooner in the term for two reasons: (1) we received ethics

approval on the second week of classes and (2) we did not want the questionnaire to interfere

with the usual classroom schedule. It is thus possible that the comparison of the initial and

subsequent questionnaire does not fully capture the extent of the impact that the course had on

pre-service teachers.

In spite of this methodological issues, four pre-service teachers who had initially

indicated feeling somewhat prepared for parental interaction in the first questionnaire, declared

feeling prepared in the last questionnaire. These pre-service teachers indicated that the course has

contributed to their feeling of preparedness for parental interaction. As such, one pre-service

teacher indicated that she "gained insights into how parents like communication to happen",

another pre-service teacher felt prepared because she was ready to "make an effort to build a

relationship with them [parents]", and the other two pre-service teachers indicated that the course

has helped them and that they learned parents' expectation and became aware of different types

of communication.

Moreover, three out of 14 pre-service teachers maintained their feeling of being

somewhat prepared from the beginning to the end of the course. Nevertheless, these pre-service

teachers indicated in the last questionnaire that they felt more confident in their skills than before. As such, pre-service teacher 12 wrote that she felt prepared to interact with parents who are engaged, but she would not know how to motivate parents who are not interested in being engaged in their child's education. Pre-service teacher 13 indicated that she felt more confident in her skills, but needed more experience to feel prepared for parental interaction:

> I feel more confident and prepared to communicate with families as my knowledge of strategies & general understanding has expanded. Although, I do feel that I still have a lot to learn, but that will come through my experience.

And pre-service teacher 11 wrote that this course has helped her acquire a good basis for parental interaction, but that she needed practice in order to feel confident in her parent communication skills:

> I believe I still have a lot to learn and through practice I know my level of confidence will increase with regards to communicating with parents. However, I do feel that I have a good base. I have learned how important it is to show the parents that I know their child on a personal level. I also know to involve them in the decisions. Throughout this class, I have learned how important it is to parents to feel included in their child's educational life. I should not impose suggestions, but rather learn from the parent and come up with solutions that we all agree with.

Therefore, because they lack practical experience and because they grasp the complexity of parent-teacher interactions, these three pre-service teachers did not feel prepared to interact with parents. However, despite not feeling fully prepared for parental interaction, these pre-service teachers felt that the course has provided them with a good basis and has helped them gain confidence in their communication skills.

In conclusion, more pre-service teachers felt prepared for parental interaction at the end of the course, than at the beginning. Moreover, the pre-service teachers who felt only somewhat prepared for parental interaction had gained confidence in their communication skills and ability to take the parents' point of view. Overall, regardless of their initial perceived preparedness level, all pre-service teachers gained new knowledge, additional practical experience, and insights into parents' perspectives by participating in the parent-teacher communication course.

Discussion

In this study, I sought to portray the changes in pre-service teachers' and parents' perspectives on parent-teacher communication. following continuous, weekly interactions with each other, within the context of a parent-teacher communication undergraduate course. Throughout the course, I obtained parents' and pre-service teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher communication and triangulated the data using multiple measures: focus groups, class discussions, individual interviews, questionnaires, and course assignments. By using such methods, I captured each parent's unique experience and perspective about parent-teacher communication and the evolution of pre-service teachers' understanding of the topic. I analyzed and interpreted the data using emergent themes, as well as a priori codes from three complementary theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental engagement model (1995), and Epstein's home-school partnership model (1987). Moreover, I adopted Donna Mertens' *transformative paradigm* (Mertens, 2007) in order to capture how a context in which the parents felt empowered to share their opinions with future teachers led to a transformative experience for both parents and pre-service teachers. Overall, this study provided a detailed description of parents' views of parent-

teacher communication, and of the impact that the nursery and the course set-up had on parents'

and pre-service teachers' understanding of home-school partnerships.

Parents' Views on Parent-teacher Communication

Each nursery parent had unique experiences and perspectives on parent-teacher

communication, which I highlighted in the case studies. However, the nursery parents appeared

to be a cohesive group, as they all shared a desire to be highly engaged in their children's

education and to form home-school partnerships. Throughout the study, the nursery parents

demonstrated their belief that their children would do better in school when parents and teachers

work together towards the same goals. In accordance with these parents' beliefs, correlational

studies have repeatedly linked high levels of parental engagement to student success (Hill &

Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Moreover, the nursery parents valued having ongoing communication with teachers, as

this allowed them to become engaged and have a say in their child's education. Also, some of the

nursery parents indicated that they saw open communication as a necessary precursor to home-

school partnerships. Indeed, in Epstein's partnership model (1997), parenting, communicating,

volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community are

types of parental engagement that have to be facilitated, in order for successful home-school

partnerships to occur. Therefore, the nursery parents were able to grasp the interrelated nature of

parental engagement, parent-teacher communication, and home-school partnerships.

Because they saw the benefits of home-school partnerships, the nursery parents expected

teachers to inform them of what goes in the classroom and to involve them in decision-making

concerning their children's education. These parents displayed awareness of systemic challenges

to parental engagement (i.e., parents not freely allowed in schools, limited opportunities for face-

to-face discussion with teachers, etc.). Thus, the nursery parents sought to overcome the systemic challenges by establishing a partnership with teachers. In agreement with these parents' perspectives, Pushor (2009) stated that Canadian schools tended to diminish the role of families and communities in children's education and development and that such a barrier to parental engagement can be countered when teachers establish a partnership with parents.

Impact of the Nursery and Course Context on Parents' Views

The nursery's program is unique, in that the parents' extended presence in the classroom is welcomed. As such, nursery parents can stay in the classroom with their child as long as needed, and after the child is ready to separate, the parents can observe the child play from an adjacent room, through a one-way mirror. The nursery's program and set-up encourage parental engagement and create multiple opportunities for parent-teacher communication. Thus, the nursery parents had the opportunity of experiencing a successful home-school partnership and of improving their parenting skills by observing and consulting with the educators.

Moreover, the parent-teacher communication course encouraged parents to voice their opinions and discuss their concerns with the pre-service teachers. Therefore, the parents had the opportunity to learn about educational theories, to reflect on the school system, and most importantly, they practiced asking questions and some expressed that they felt empowered to be engaged and seek a home-school partnership in the future. Therefore, the nursery parents got to experience first-hand and to teach to pre-service teachers the benefits of a successful home-school partnership.

Overall, the nursery facilitated the creation partnerships between the educators and the parents by enabling parents to become engaged in their children's education. Indeed, in the first level of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised model of parental involvement, Walker et al.

(2005) identified three major sources of parental motivation for engagement: parental beliefs about their role in their children's education, parental perceptions of invitations for involvement, and parental perceived life context. At the nursery, parents' and children's needs were accommodated by inviting parents into the classroom. As such, children could benefit from parental reassurance when stressed and parents could play a role in their children's education by providing reassurance to their children, whenever their life circumstances permitted them to attend class. In other words, the nursery's program addressed the three sources of parental motivation for engagement identified by Walker et al. (2005), thus empowering parents to become engaged.

The Pedagogical Approach of the Parent-teacher Communication Course

Few Canadian universities offer parent communication courses for pre-service teachers and little is known about the impact that these courses have on pre-service teachers' perspectives (Pushor, 2009). Previous investigations of the impact of parent communication courses on pre-service teachers' perspectives have shown that the most successful pedagogical approaches involved some type of direct experience with parents, and focused on relationship building (Evans, 2013). The parent-teacher communication course in this study had at its core weekly discussions with parents, which encouraged the formation of a relationship between pre-service teachers and parents. Therefore, the pre-service teachers in this course obtained first-hand experience with parental interaction and relationship building through communication.

In addition to engaging in parental interactions, the pre-service teachers in the parent-teacher communication course had the opportunity of observing the parents interact with their children's educators, and to read, discuss, and reflect on course material. Therefore, the pre-service teachers in this course were enabled to learn about parent-teacher communication

through diverse means: textbook readings, class discussions, parental opinions, self-reflection, weekly classroom interactions with parents, observation, and practice (i.e., mock parent-teacher interview based on observations recorded throughout the course). Indeed, previous research suggests that simply creating opportunities for parental interactions is insufficient and that opportunities for reflection following the interactions are an essential part of a successful pedagogical approach (Dunn-Kenney, 2010). Furthermore, the *universal design for learning*, which consists of a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn, emphasizes the importance of providing multiple means of representation, of action and expression, and of engagement (CAST, 2011). Thus, the diverse learning opportunities in the course justify the change in pre-service teacher's perspectives from the beginning to the end of the course.

Impact of the Course on Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives

By the end of the course, most pre-service teachers gained a deeper understanding of parent-teacher communication and some expressed that they felt more prepared for parent interactions. As such, the pre-service teachers demonstrated the following new considerations and aptitudes: (1) the ability to engage in deeper discussions on parent-teacher communication, (2) an increased awareness of parents' struggles and preferences, (3) the willingness to accommodate parents' diverse needs and values, (4) a deeper understanding of what constitutes good teaching, (5) increased agency over their ability to improve their teaching, (6) a new focus on self-improvement, (7) the ability to reflect on their own attitudes, and (8) the ability to reflect on and find solutions to diversity-related parent-teacher communication challenges. In accordance with these results, Evans (2013) identified the most common positive outcomes of educating pre-service teachers on parent communication to be increased awareness of prejudices

and diversity, increased confidence in their skills, and increased ability to use knowledge about families and communities to improve teaching. Therefore, the pre-service teachers in this course have gained similar skills to those outlined in previous research. In addition, they seem to express that they had gained an additional focus on self-improvement and problem-solving, as well as a deeper understanding of the complexity of parent-teacher interaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study explored the impact of guided, weekly interactions between pre-service teachers and parents on their perspectives of parent-teacher communication, in a unique academic environment. By following the trajectory of parents and pre-service teachers' perceptions, this qualitative study contributed to the limited empirical research on the impact of parent communication courses on pre-service teachers' perspectives and the potential benefits that may arise from forming parent-teacher partnerships in preschool. Moreover, this study is unique, in that it portrayed the perspectives of parents who felt empowered by the research context to voice their opinions on parent-teacher communication. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations.

Firstly, the main researchers played a dual-role, as both researchers and course teacher/teacher assistant. It is possible that, because the researchers evaluated the pre-service teachers' performance in the course, the pre-service teachers felt somewhat compelled to engage in discussions or actions that would please the researchers. However, we ensured that the data collection did not interfere with the usual course conduct. We respected the schedule of the course and all pre-service teachers engaged in the same course tasks, regardless of their participation. Moreover, it was made clear to the pre-service-teachers that the researchers were blind to their participation in the study, until the final grades were recorded. Therefore, the data

collection was planned to minimize intrusiveness and to capture the natural learning process of pre-service teachers.

Secondly, because of our efforts to keep the course running as usual, we collected the initial data from pre-service teachers (i.e., first focus group and first questionnaire), three weeks into the course. Therefore, it may be that there were larger differences in pre-service teachers' perspectives from the beginning to the end of the course, than the ones identified in the current study. In future studies, it may be desirable to collect the initial data on the first day of classes, before the pre-service teachers are exposed to course material, or to parent interactions and observations.

Thirdly, in our efforts to minimize the intrusiveness of data collection in class, we used an audio recorder to collect data from class discussions and focus groups. This data collection method did not allow us to identify the students talking on tape. Therefore, in this study, we analyzed the overall change in pre-service teachers' perspectives, as a group, rather than looking at how individual pre-service teachers' perspectives evolved. Future studies may consider using video recording, in order to keep track of what each pre-service student says. Such an approach would allow researchers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of how the course impacted each pre-service teacher individually.

Fourthly, due to the limited duration of this study (i.e., 13 weeks), we could not obtain the parents' initial perspectives on parent-teacher communication, prior to their exposure to the studied context. All nursery parents had enrolled in the nursery's program at different times in the past and thus had spent varied amounts of time in the environment, from 1 month to 5 years. It may be informative if future studies tracked the evolution in parents' perspectives, from the first day in the environment, to the last, in order to paint a picture of the impact of the

environment on parents' views. Moreover, future studies may wish to follow the pre-service teachers over a few years, in order to study the long-term impact of the course on pre-service teacher' preparedness for working with families.

Despite these limitations, the current study is unique, in that it is the first study, to my knowledge, to investigate the perspectives of parents and pre-service teachers on their weekly interactions in an academic setting.

Practical Implications

This qualitative study on parents' and pre-service teachers' perspective on parent-teacher communication has several important practical implications for designing pre-service teacher education programs and for establishing home-school partnerships.

Firstly, the results of this study inform us of the basic principles that teachers can apply in order to form a relationship with parents. As such, the results of this study suggest that a home-school partnership can be established when there is open communication between parents and teachers and when both parties want to build a relationship. Having open communication provides parents with opportunities to articulate their opinions and provides teachers with opportunities to listen to parents' concerns with an open-mind and non-defensively. The parents in this study deeply appreciated being listened to and having their opinions taken into consideration by both educators and pre-service teachers. In return, the pre-service teachers benefitted from hearing diverse points of view from diverse parents and understood the impact that a teacher's attitude can have on parental engagement and parent-teacher communication. Therefore, it appears that including parents' voices in pre-service teacher education programs can be mutually beneficial for parents and pre-service teachers. Equally, there may be value to including parents' voices in educational policy making.

Lastly, this study informs pre-service teacher education programs on how to prepare pre-service teachers for interaction with parents. First of all, in accordance with previous research the results of this study highlight that it is challenging for pre-service teachers to gain direct experience with parents (Evans, 2013). While this study demonstrated that parent interaction can have a positive impact on pre-service teachers' attitudes and understanding of parent-teacher communication, one course alone is not sufficient to prepare pre-service teachers to working with parents. Therefore, there is a need to create parent interaction opportunities in internships and in other courses and to integrate theory with hands-on experience. This implication is supported by previous research, which showed that neither theory, nor practice alone are not effective teaching tools (Dunn-Kenney, 2010; Evans, 2013). One way of integrating theory with practice is by offering a parent-teacher communication course concomitantly with an internship in which pre-service teachers engage weekly with parents. Such a pairing of a course with an internship would provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect on and learn from their interactions with parents and to create links between theory and practice.

This same integrative approach could be applied to teach in-service teachers who want to improve their parental communication skills. As voiced by one of the pre-service teachers in this study, all teachers can benefit from continuous professional development:

> While I believe that I am prepared [to interact and communicate with families], I know that there is always room to learn more. I would like to keep expanding my knowledge on the topic in order to become the best I can at communicating with families.

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HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Appendix A: Outline of topics covered in class

DATES	TOPICS (tentative)	READINGS
Week 1	Course Outline Introductions Welcoming Families "What is a family?"	Textbook: Gestwicki, C. (2016). *Home, school, and community relations: A guide to working with families.*9th Edition. NY: Delmar Learning.
Week 2	Early Childhood, Transitions and New Beginnings	Chapter 1: A Day With Two Families: Diversity of Experience Chapter 2: Families Today
Week 3	Observing and Interacting with Children and Families	Chapter 3: Parenting Chapter 4: What is Family Involvement? Chapter 5: Benefits and Barriers in Teacher-Family Partnerships
Week 4	Parent-Teacher-Child Relationships Challenging Behavior	Chapter 7: Good Beginnings with Parents and Children Chapter 8: Informal Communication with Families
Week 5	Family-School Relations: Obstacles to Relationship-Building	Chapter 5: Potential Barriers to Teacher-Family Partnerships Chapter 6: Foundations of a successful Partnership
Week 6	Parent Involvement in Schools	Chapter10: Families in the Classroom Chapter 11: Parent Education
Week 7	Culture and Schools Preventing Challenging Behaviour	Chapter 13: Working with Families from Diverse Backgrounds Chapter 15: Working to Resolve Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors
Week 8	Student oral presentations	

Week 9	Positive approaches for working in inclusive classrooms	
Week 10	Child-parent-teacher conferences	Chapter 9: Parent-Teacher Conference
Week 11	Parenting a Special Needs Child

Coping with Changes in the Life Cycle | Chapter 12: It Takes a Village: Teachers, Families, and Communities

Chapter 14: Working with Families in Particular Circumstances |
| Week 12 | Parent-Teacher Interviews in your groups | |
| Week 13 | Community Potluck – Students help organize the potluck to thank the families for their participation | |

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Appendix B: Summary of data collection process

Table 1

Data collection method by collection time and participant type

Collection time	Participant type	Data collection method	
T1	Parent	demographic information, parent focus group	
	Student	demographic information, student focus group 1, pre- questionnaire	
T2	Parent	parent-teacher interviews; parents and students focus group	Field notes and
	Student	parent-teacher interviews, parents and students focus group, reflective response assignments	reflective journal
T3	Parent	individual interviews	
	Student	student focus group 2, post-questionnaire	

Notes. T1 = beginning of the course; T2 = during the course; T3 = at the end of the course.

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

<div align="center">Appendix C: Focus group themes and sample questions</div>

FOR PARENTS:

Themes:

1. Family involvement:

sample questions: In your opinion, what constitutes family involvement in education?/ In your opinion as a parent, what is a parent's role in children's education?/ What kind of educational activities do you do with your child?

2. Roles and expectations for teachers:

sample questions: In your opinion as a parent, what is a teacher's role in children's education?/ What are your expectations from teachers?

3. Perspectives on parent-teacher relationships

sample questions: According to you, what constitutes a successful parent-teacher partnership?/ What kind of interactions have you had so far with your children's teachers?

4. Benefits and barriers to partnerships

sample questions: In your opinion, what are the benefits of forming a partnership with teachers?/ In your experience/to your knowledge, what are the obstacles to overcome when interacting with teachers?

5. Culture and diversity:

sample questions: In you experience so far, what role have your cultural values played in the relationship with your children's teachers?/ What do you think that a teacher's role is in addressing cultural differences in class?

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

6. Special needs and particular circumstances:

sample questions: How can teachers offer support to your children and your families during life

changes or difficult times?

FOR STUDENTS:

Themes:

1. Family involvement:

sample questions: In your opinion, what constitutes family involvement in education?/ In your

opinion, what is a teacher's role in family involvement?/ How can teachers support/encourage

educational activities done by parents at home?

2. Roles and expectations for parents:

sample questions: In your opinion as a teacher, what is a parent's role in children's education?/

What are your expectations from parents?

3. Perspectives on parent-teacher relationships

sample questions: According to you, what constitutes a successful parent-teacher partnership?/

What kind of interactions have you had so far with your with parents of students?

4. Benefits and barriers to partnerships

sample questions: In your opinion, what are the benefits of forming a partnership with parents?/

In your experience/to your knowledge, what are the obstacles to overcome when interacting with

parents?

5. Culture and diversity:

sample questions: In your opinion, what role may cultural values play in the relationship with your students' parents?/ What do you think that a teacher's role is in addressing cultural differences in class?

6. Special needs and particular circumstances:

sample questions: How can teachers offer support to children and their families during life changes or difficult times?

Appendix D: Parent interview protocol

Themes:

1. experiences with nursery educators

sample questions: How would you describe your relationship with the nursery educators?/ Which aspects of your interaction with the educators did you like and which aspects did you like less?

2. perceived impact of parent-educator relationship on parental engagement

sample questions: How do you think that the relationship that you established with your child's educators influences how you become engaged in your child's education?/ How have the educational activities that you used to do with your child changed?

3. perspectives on parent-teacher communication

sample questions: Could you share some of your thoughts on parent-teacher communication? You can refer back to your interactions with the pre-service teachers during class time and to your interactions with nursery teachers/ What are your expectations with regards to parent-teacher interactions?/ What kind of relationship would you like to establish with your children's educators/teachers?

4. challenges of parent-teacher communication

sample questions: According to you, what are some of the challenges of parent-teacher interactions?/ How could parent-teacher communication be improved?

5. relationship with pre-service teachers

sample questions: How would you describe your relationship with the pre-service teachers? How do you think that your interactions with the pre-service teachers may have been if they were your child's teacher? Would you feel as comfortable sharing your thoughts?

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Appendix E: Questionnaire for pre-service teachers

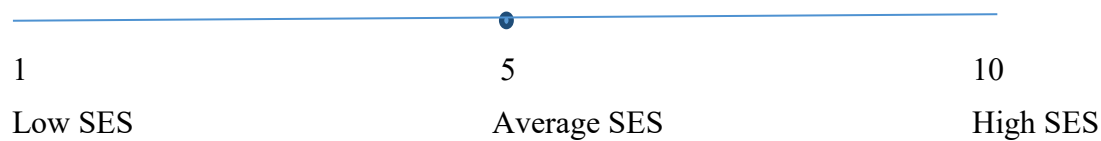I. Demographic information (only in the questionnaire given at the beginning of the course):

1. **Marital status**:

2. **Do you have any children? If yes, please list your children's ages**:

3. **National origin**

4. **Religious affiliation**:

5. **Mark with X on the line bellow your family's socioeconomic status (as you perceive it).**

1	5	10
Low SES	Average SES	High SES

6. **What year of study are you in?**

7. **In short, what are your expectations for this class?**

II. Questions: (same questions asked in the questionnaires given at the beginning and at the end of the semester. In the questionnaire given to students, extra space was allotted after every question, allowing for long answers)

1. In your opinion, what constitutes good teaching? (adapted from Blasi, 2002)

2. According to you, what are teachers' responsibilities towards children and their families?

3. As a teacher, how do you expect the parents of the children you teach to be engaged? (inspired by Hoover-Dempsey - Parents' perceptions of general invitations for involvement from teachers)

4. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons that may hold parents back from becoming engaged with the school and/or teachers? (inspired by Hoover-Dempsey - Parents' perceived life context)

5. What do you think matters most for teachers when engaging with the families of their students?

(adapted from Blasi, 2002)

Rank order your responses, with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least important:
__developing a relationship of trust and understanding
__providing emotional support
__guiding them to community resources and services
__teaching parents skills related parenting and/or to helping their children in school
__learning about the context of their lives
__working in partnership with parents to accomplish their goals for the child
__helping the child be successful

6. At this time, do you feel prepared to communicate and interact with families? Explain why.

(adapted from Blasi, 2002)

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS
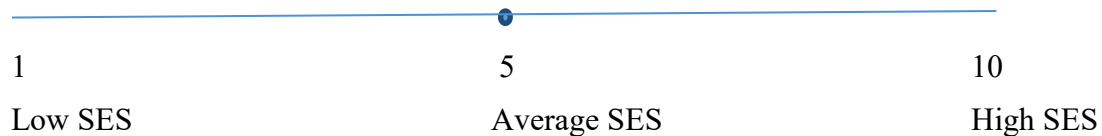
Appendix F: Demographic information sheet for parents

1. **Marital status**:

2. **Please list the ages of your children**:

3. **National origin**   Yours:

Children's father:

4. **Religious affiliation**:   Yours:

Children's father:

Children:

5. **Mark with X on the line bellow your family's socioeconomic status (as you perceive it).**

1	5	10
Low SES	Average SES	High SES

6. **Is there any other general information that you think would help me understand your lived experiences and perspectives in relation to parent-teacher interactions?**

Appendix G: Samples of coding

CODEBOOK

Value codes & **THEMES**	In-Vivo coding		Quotes	
EVOLUTION OF PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AT THE NURSERY				
Initial parent-teacher relationship: when she first started at the nursery, 6 years ago	line	code	line	
	21	I perceived them as a teacher for myself as well, not just for my children...		
	24	I kind of relied on their experience a lot		
	24	there was a lot of growth for me, not just for my children.		
	25	it was like a family growth, [...] that occurred with the teachers here	25	"So it was like a family growth, I think, that occurred with the teachers here and that's part of what I enjoy, I mean, there are a lot of things I enjoy."
	27	realizing that it was happening when it was happening, that we were all learning.		
	30	So we're all [parents] kind of, incorporating it [teachers' methods].	28	"And then I'd see things, like, my husband would do things and he'd be like (incomprehensible word) and I'd be like: "But what would you, why are you doing that" and he'd be like: "Well, I learned that from what I saw at Concordia". And he was like "Oh, okay". So we're al kind of, incorporating it."
	31	So that [family growth] was kind of an interesting part of me.		
Current parent-teacher relationship	33	So now, I see it a little bit differently.		
	19	There was a big change from previous years		
	34	I think there's some growth happening on both sides [educator and parent]		
	34	the teachers are a little bit newer so they're learning,		

		and [...] now I'm seeing myself as trying to help them learn.		
	36	So it's kinda switched a little, which is still an interesting place to be.		
	37	it's a different place right now.		
	37	so I've learned some things and now I feel like I have things to share, with them [educators], to help them grow a little bit.		
PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT				
Communication facilitators	48	in terms of the relationship part, the fact that they're [educators] so open makes it easy for us to share, as parents.		
	71	openness and accepting of the feedback... is what made the relationship.	70	"And that's what I mean though like it's, yes, there were some things at the beginning that needed to tweaked but the openness and accepting of the feedback...is what made the relationship. Because it would have gone the other way. It could have gone as in "Oh, you know, like why are these parents against us?"
	79	And I think, whomever it is, [...] whether the teacher or the parent, you have to be able to understand that you're never going to be right 100% of the time		
	81	but working through it together is what makes the nursery a great place		
Expectations from teachers	125	I've always enjoyed being able to talk and see the educators and be involved even though I don't need to be in the classroom.		
	217	I expect to be informed of the things that are going on with my kids, um...as soon as possible.		
	219	I don't want them to tell me every day what their daily [...]		

	220	some teachers take ownership and deal with it on their own, but I think before that happens, I also need to know it's going on		
	221	the communication has to be there in some way.		
	226	I don't have a problem with email as long as we can meet up and talk about it after too	224	"If I, If I'm, I mean, I'm not available to see the teacher, um, or even if it's something long sometimes, it's it's, you know, maybe they need to think through how to explain it and, depending on someone's comfort zone, I don't have a problem with email as long as we can meet up and talk about it after too."
	229	I like when someone takes ownership, like the teacher takes ownership, but I still would like to be informed of what's going on		
	231	if I've brought it up to them, I would have expected them to have seen it and come up with their own plan of action		
	233	I would have expected them [teachers] to communicate to me FIRST before they do anything		
	235	in a non-judgmental way		
	236	you've [teacher] taken ownership in your own way by telling me what your action plan is, you've communicated it to me, so that at least gives me a chance to kinda give you my feedback if I have some to give		
	241	it's their [teachers'] way of keeping me involved		
	254	we have to work together with the teacher, so we can influence them in a similar way at least		

	255	communication, inform me before they take a step is a big thing for me.		
	264	there's got to be some trust, um, of the parents.		
	264	I mean, they [teachers] expect us [parents] to trust them [teachers]		
	266	so they should [trust] us, so there's [...] an inherent [...] like the teachers automatically expect parents to trust them, right, because they're the teachers, they need to be trusted to do their job.		
	271	they need to trust us to know our children		
	273	if we [parents] bring up something...not be disregarded, which I've had happened to me.		
	289	I think that TRUST, you know, has to be there.		
	290	There's got to be communication		
	291	there has to be this two-way street that way.		
	323	they [teachers] have to take the parents' point of view in		
	328	at least...you know... THINK about what we're saying		
	330	Like that's where the trust comes in [meaning that teachers should trust what parents say]		
	332	As opposed to just disregard it because it's not something that they know, themselves [teachers]		
	363	information on what's in general going on in the classroom, would be really helpful...		
	389	Being informed		

	393	...finding channels to...uhm...give you information about what happens in school		
	397	once eveeeery, maybe month?		
	397	maybe once a month, sending something like that, like a general communication about what's happening		
	402	once in a while [is enough]		
Barriers to parental involvement	339	that's kind of the big one [parent not being considered by teacher]		
	341	I guess the other thing still relates to communication.		
	360	[about a particular teacher who doesn't communicate with parents] so you really know NOTHING about what's going on unless your child tells you.		
	366	it [communication] ends up being a little bit of a little problem sometimes		
	371	they start and end at different times during the year, and half of the time, I have no idea what they're doing.		
	373	Like, I don't know what workshops are being given because no one is telling us...		
	375	So that [...] becomes a problem, because [...] in terms of helping my child through the schooling year, I need to know what they're doing. more or less		
	380	But I CAN'T, I can't support my child through it if I don't know what they're doing.		
	387	And I think big one was the [...] trust, not being heard, but otherwise, that's pretty much it		

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	Q	PRE- QUESTIONNAIRE		POST-QUESTIONNAIRE	
		Key words:	Checklist:	Key words:	Checklist:
G.F.	1	• Showing care and support to students • Listen and respect students and families • Flexibility	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples	• Flexibility • Respect • Openness • Communication	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples
	2	• Care for children • Educate • Teach mutual respect • Listen • Acceptance • Welcoming • Making children feel comfortable	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples	• Acceptance of diversity • Understanding	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples
	3	• Communication • Show interest in child and what they are learning • Inform teacher of problems	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples	• Presence in school lives • Volunteer in classroom	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples
	4	• Lack of feeling welcome • Lack of feeling acceptance • Language barrier • Not part of their culture • Too much going on at home • Lack of comfort sharing problems with teacher	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples	• Lack of time • Lack of acceptance in classroom • Feeling of lack of contribution	☒General ☐ Elaborated ☐ Examples
	5	TOP 3[1]: A-B-E		TOP 3[1]: F - A - E	
				New (NA)[2]: F	
	6	Prepared? ☒Yes ☐No ☐Somewhat		Prepared? ☒Yes ☐No ☐ Somewhat	

				Learned (NA)[3:]	• Understanding parental point of view
	7	Expectations:	• Improve observation skills • Parental communication skills		

Appendix H: Overview of themes and value codes for each codebook

Individual interviews with parents, done at the end of the term (April/May 2017)

Codebook: **Na**	
Themes	Value codes
EVOLUTION OF PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AT THE NURSERY	Initial parent-teacher relationship: when she first started at the nursery, 6 years ago
	Current parent-teacher relationship
PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Communication facilitators
	Expectations from teachers
	Barriers to parental involvement
INFLUENCE OF THE NURSERY ON THE PARENT	Perceived impact of parent-teacher relationship at the nursery on parental engagement
	Parenting techniques learned from the nursery educators
THE NURSERY'S EDUCATORS	Transition to new educators
	Characteristics of current nursery educators: Gala and Gassia
PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NURSRY'S EDUCATORS	Parent-teacher communication at the nursery
	Topics brought up by the parents to the educator (parent-initiated discussion)
	Parental involvement at the nursery
PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS AT JONATHAN (ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL ATTENDED BY HER OLDER KIDS)	Communication Problem at Jonathan
	Parental involvement at Jonathan
	Parent-teacher communication at Jonathan
	Parental initiative countering the school's lack of action to solve her son's speech problem
EXPERIENCES IN THE PARENT COMMUNICATIN COURSE (recording stopped)	Na said that in the beginning she learned a lot form the educators and the course, but now, after many years at the nursery, she sees her interactions with pre-service teachers as an opportunity to mold and prepare pre-service teachers for interactions with parents in the "outside world". She strongly believed that theory from books is not enough. She also believes that she would be as comfortable sharing her thoughts if the pre-service teachers were her kids' teachers.

Codebook: **Ss**	
Themes	Value codes

THE NURSERY	Parent's view of the nursery
	Importance of nursery to parent (study time for mom + activities for child)
EXPERIENCE AT THE NURSERY	Parent's introduction to the nursery (through G., nursery educator)
	Child's experience at the nursery
	Problem encountered at the nursery: S. was comfortable being alone at the nursery, but seeing that other kids have their moms always around, he asked for the same
NURSERY'S EDUCATORS	View of the educators' approach
	Desired changes in the educator's approach (more educational activities and more discipline)
	Parent-teacher communication at the nursery
THE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION COURSE	Parental influence on future teachers
	Source of information on schools and the schooling system
	Influence on parent: empowering
PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN THE PARENT COMMUNICATION COURSE	Interactions with pre-service teachers
	Comparison of parent-pre-service teacher relationship and parent-teacher relationship
SCHOOL	Experience at school open houses
	Expectations for future parent-teacher communication
VALUES	Values: views on raising kids
	Importance of aligning values with teachers

Codebook: **Be**	
Themes	Value codes
MOTHER'S LIVED TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS	Parent-teacher relationship At the Nursery
	Experienced Child-teacher relationship: Be's relationship with childhood teachers
VIEWS ON PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL	Mother's views of school teachers
	Mother's Expectations for School Teachers
	Perceived Challenges to parent-teacher communication in school
	Mother's Willingness/Efforts to Create a Relationship with School Teachers
SCHOOL STRUCTURE AS A BARRIER TO PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS	Mother's dislikes: parents exclusion from school process
	Improving/Changing the Structure
	Stagnation of System: hard to create a change
VIEWS ON PRENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Mother's Views on the role of parents in education
	Comparison of Parents from Nursery and Mainstream Parents (in terms of parental involvement)

TRANSITION BETWEEN GALA AND FIONNA AT THE NURSERY	Mother's experience of the transition
	Child's experience of the transition, as perceived by the mother
THE NURSERY'S IMPACT ON Be	Change in Educational Activities at Home
	Impact on Expectations for Future Parent-Teacher Communication
VIEWS ON ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS	Parent-Teacher Communication in Alternative Schools (based on info from Na)
	Mother's Opinion of Alternative Schools
R.'S SCHOOL READINESS	Child's suitability for School (how his characteristics fit with school environment)
	Child's Potential Challenges in School
MOTHER'S OPINION OF FACE SCHOOL BASED ON A VISIT	Dislike for Face's Expectation from Parents: parents are treated as tools (they are irrelevant, but they need to help)
	Dislike for Face's Constraining Policies
MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION COURSE	Feelings about participating in the parent-teacher communication class
	Mother's Relationship With Pre-Service Teachers
	Impact of interactions with pre-service teachers: Change in the Way Mother Views Teachers
	Change in the Mother's way of Thinking About Parental Involvement following participation in the parent-teacher communication course

Codebook: **Ca**	
Themes	Value codes
VIEWS ON THE NURSERY	Likes about Nursery: small group, going outside
	Suggestions for Nursery: more time or full-time
PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AT THE NURSERY AND ITS IMPACT	Parent-Teacher Communication with Nursery's Educators
	Impact of parent-educators relationship on parent (reciprocal influence and parent encouragement and help)
	Impact of parent-teacher relationship on parenting style
	Indirect Impact of parent-teacher relationship on children - Change in Children's Attitude Caused by a more carefree parenting style
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AT A DAYCARE IN CHECK REPUBLIC AND IMPACT ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Similarities between Nursery and Daycare in Czech Republic
	Impact of Previous Daycare (Czech Republic) on Parent Involvement
	Views on parental involvement Before Experiencing Daycare/Educational Enrollment
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL	Mother's Desire to be Involved in Child's Education
	Parental involvement in School as a means to create change when needed

UNDERSTANDING OF PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS	Views on Parent-Teacher Relationships
	Perspective of Trust in Parent-Teacher Relationships
UNDERSTANDING OF PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION	Views on parent-teacher communication
	Constraints to Parent-Teacher Communication - Time
	Views on Parent-Teacher Communication at school
	Expectations for Parent-Teacher Communication at school
	Parent-Teacher Communication as a tool to address challenges and bring about change
UNDESRSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF TEACHERS	Expectations from Teachers
	Characteristics Aspiring Teachers Should Possess - Motivation
MOTHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN THE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION CLASS	Relationship with Harriet's Students

Codebook: **Sa**	
Themes	Value codes
EXPERIENCE WITH A PREVIOUS DAYCARE	Ari's experience at a previous daycare, which he attended for a few weeks
	Description of Ari's Previous Caretaker: her characteristics and approach to education
KEEPING A. AT HOME AFTER NOT ADJUSTING IN DAYCARE	Making the decision of postponing Sa's return to work in order to keep A. at home, after not finding a suitable daycare
	Efforts made by parents to keep A. at home when he was not adjusting to the previous daycare
A.'S EXPERIENCE AT THE NURSERY	Ari's comfortability at the Nursery
	Nursery's educational structure, a good fit for A.
	Mother's wished changes for the nursery program (more hours)
THE NURSERY'S EDUCATORS	Nursery educators' teaching approach: problem-solving in the classroom
	Parent's Relationship with educators at Nursery
MOM'S EXPERIENCES WITH PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION	At the nursery
	At previous daycare that A. attended for a few weeks

BENEFITS OF PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION	Parent-teacher Communication as a means to problem-solving/ addressing parents' concerns
PLANS FOR AFTER THE NURSERY: PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL	A.'s next daycare, following the nursery
	School options for A.
SA'S CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PICKING A SCHOOL FOR A.	School characteristics that are important to Sa
	A.'s learning style and needs
FORESSEN CHALLENGES THAT A. MAY ENCOUTNER IN THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL	Challenges related to school structure
	Anticipated challenges for A. based on mother's' challenges as a school student
	Challenges related to peer interactions
SEEING FROM THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE	Mom's relationship with her students as a university teacher
	Understanding towards the challenges faced by teachers in parent-teacher communication
EXPERIENCES IN THE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION COURSE	Evaluation of Harriet's course
	Relationship with the pre-service teachers
	Experience as a Concordia child studies student 20 years ago

Focus groups

Codebook: **First student focus group**, Jan 19	
Themes	Value codes
PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP	Benefits of partnership on teacher's relationship with parents
	Benefits of partnerships for children
	Influence of partnership on parental involvement at home
HOMEWORK	Teachers' expectations of parents with regards to helping kids at home
	Parents' challenges in helping kids with homework
	Teacher's role in supporting kids' learning at home
BARRIERS INTERFERING WITH ESTABLISHING A PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP	Lack of open communication
	Mismatch in Beliefs Regarding the Curriculum
	Split-Classes
	Language Barrier

The Role of the Teacher in addressing Cultural Differences	Between Students' family and the School
	Between Students and the Teacher
	Between the Students and the Class
THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL	Being open to Different Solutions
	Dependent on the Teacher's preparedness to work with children with special needs
	Creating a Partnership Between the Teacher and Parents
	Forming a Relationship with the Student and offering them support
	Documenting observations on the child's problem behavior and sharing them with the parents
	Seek out Information and share information with others

Codebook: **Second student focus group**, April 13th	
Themes	Value codes
VIEWS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Knowledge of the types of parental involvement
	Understanding of how parents want to be involved in school
PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Teacher's expectations of the type of parental involvement: Teachers Want parents to be involved in a specific way and do not consider the parents' wants and needs
	Communication Barriers
	Lack ok presence of Parents in School Setting: hard for teachers to make stand against the system
FACILITATOTRS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	At the institution level: parents being allowed inside freely
	At the teacher level: knowledge of the family situation
TEACHERS' CHALLENGES WHEN ENGAGING WITH PARENTS	Justifying themselves to parents and considering parents' wants while keeping teaching integrity
	Hope that challenges can be overcome and a partnership between parents and teacher can be formed
TEACHERS' ROLE IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Informing parents of what happens in the classroom and justifying educational approach/decisions
DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM	The example of a nursery mom teaching cultural awareness to her child
	The nursery parents' concerns regarding diversity in the classroom: child being accepted by peers
	Alternative schools address diversity in the classroom better than public schools (according to some nursery parents)
	Nursery parents pick schools according to their child's individual needs, but other parents do not have the choice

Codebook: **Parent focus group**. Feb 16th	
Themes	Value codes
VIEWS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A CHILD'S EDUCATION	The Parent's Role in a Child's Education
	Parental Involvement at the Nursery
FACILITATOR OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	Teacher making the effort to include the parents
	Parent community encourages parental involvement
THE NON-ACADEMIC GROWTH OF CHILDREN	Childs' Growth More Than Just Academics
	Nursery Parents Versus Mainstream Parents on the Non-Academic Growth of Children
	Parent's Growing Demand for a Focus on the Non-Academic Growth of Children
EXPECTATIONS FOR TEACHERS	Communication
	Expertise and professionalism : Know what they're doing (teachers)
	Harmony
	Teachers changing perspective: adapt teaching to children and facilitate the learning process (not look at children through the lens of a teacher; look beyond exams and grades)
	Learn from the children
	Be Trustworthy
	Get to Know the Child
	Acknowledge Strengths as Strengths and Weaknesses as Weaknesses: teachers should align values with parents
	Guide the Child
	Prioritize teaching
PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP	Parents' Desired type of parent-teacher relationship
	Perspective on teacher-Parent-Student Relationship: the triangle
BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVMENET AND PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS	School structure as a Barriers to Parent-Teacher Partnerships and Parental involvement
	Teacher's misconceptions of Parents' motivations for being Involved in Childs' Education

HOW TEACHER CAN MAKE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK MORE PRODUCTIVE	Teachers Using a Different, Creative Approach to Help Out: propose new solutions
	Consult the Parent About the Issue
	Give the Parent the Opportunity to Voice Their Own Suggestions
DISCRIMINATION IN THE CLASSROOM	How Teachers Approached Discrimination in the Past
	How Teachers Approach Discrimination Now: A Sensitive Topic
	How Teachers Should Approach the Topic of Discrimination in the Classroom: Suggestions and Available Resources
	The Importance of Addressing Discrimination in the Classroom
	Discrimination at Home: The Parent's Approach
	What Should be Addressed in the Classroom
	Self-Awareness of Racism
SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS	Communication Between the Parent and Teacher to Improve Support from Teachers
	Teacher's Role in Supporting New Students at the School
	Students Adjusting to a New Environment

Student Codebook: Class discussion with parents on diversity, March 2nd	
Themes	Value codes
ADDRESSING CULTURAL DIVERSITY	Cultural diversity, a sensitive topic anywhere: considerations when asking for one's ethnicity
	Finding similarities within differences: a way to overcome cultural barriers
DIVERSITY IN MONTREAL	Language diversity: Bilingualism and multilingualism in Montreal is common
SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS ON THE FAMILY SITUATION OF CHILDREN THEY TEACH	Kids as a source of information for teachers on the family situation
	Techniques used by teachers to prompt kids to share some of their home life at school
THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING ABOUT DIVERSITY IN HOMOGENEOUS SCHOOLS	Teachers in homogeneous schools usually lack knowledge of diversity
	Proposed techniques to teach about diversity in homogenous classrooms
	Rightly Representing Cultures: teachers should have an understanding of diversity at a deeper level, not just from book readings

THE EXAMPLE OF A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS CHILD: THE DISECTION OF A DIFFICULT DIVERSITY CASE FOR TEACHERS	The example of a Jehovah's witness child: the cultural constraints set by the child's parents
	Teaching about diversity when parents oppose it: hard for teachers to put their core beliefs aside
	The need to adapt the curriculum to include all students in cultural lessons

Parent Codebook: Class discussion with parents on diversity, March 2nd	
Themes	Value codes
DIVERSITY	Unavoidability of discussing ethnicity when addressing diversity
	Finding similarities within differences in order to overcome cultural barriers
	Bilingualism in Montreal: interesting to outsiders
	Diversity, an important, but sensitive topic anywhere: considerations when asking for one's background
DIVERSITRY IN SCHOOL	Addressing cultural diversity in the classroom: opening the door to sharing, without pointing at kids that are different
	The downside of addressing diversity: Negative Implications
	Parents want to know how diversity is taught in class
LACK OF DIVERSITY IN A HOMOGENEOUS SCHOOL: Sa's experience	Sa's Upbringing in Homogeneous Community (Jewish Community)
	High discrimination in a homogenous school: Sa's Past Experiences in School
	Teachers Showing Intolerance - Opinions based on Sa's Experiences
KIDS AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON FAMILY LIFE FOR TEACHERS	Teachers need to ask specific questions to prompt kids to Open Up About Their weekend

Parent-teacher interviews

Codebook: **Na-teacher interview**	
Themes	Value codes
CONCORDIA'S OBSERVATION NURSERY	Na's time at the nursery
	Parent's Views of the Nursery
	Evaluation of the parent-teacher communication course
CHANGE, TRANSITIONS, AND GROWTH	Parental expectations of change
	Change: progression in child's development from 2 to 3 years old.
	Change in parenting strategy
	Change in child's environment

CHILD ATTENDING NURSERY: ADRIAN	Child characteristics
	Child's Interactions with Others
PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING	Parenting Approach: Parent's philosophy about educating kids
	Expectations towards the nursery's program and educators
	Educator's Approach
	Desire to find a Compromise in Educational Approach
	Goal Setting: to address undesirable behaviour
PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOLING SYSTEM AND TEACHERS	Views on schooling system
	Advice for future teachers: lessons and warnings for pre-service teachers
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS	Parent's views of alternative schools
	Description of Jonathan school: philosophy and structure of the school
	Parent-teacher communication in alternative schools
	Academic & developmental outcomes of alternative schools

Codebook: **Ss-teacher interview**	
Themes	Value codes
FAMILY'S SCHEDULE	Parent's Work Schedule
	Change in Lifestyle Pre- and Post-Pregnancy with second child
FAMILY ACTIVITITES	Activities at home
	Activities Outside of Home
	Extracurricular Activities
ABOUT S.	Child's personality
	Dependency on Mother for Eating
	Child's Relationship with Father
S.'S INTEGRATION AT THE NURSERY	Child's Integration at Nursery
	The impact of the nursery's structure on Sham's integration/independence at the nursery
PARENT'S VIEWS OF THE NURSERY	Fit between nursery and Family's Lifestyle and schedule
	Impressions of the nursery
	Feelings of acceptance at Nursery: felt accepted, as opposed to discriminated
THE SEARCH FOR A DAYCARE PRIOR TO COMING TO THE NURSERY	Struggles While Looking for a Daycare

FUTURE SCHOOL PLANS	Options for Schools
	Approach/Strategy in Selecting a School
	Expectations for Son's Future School
VIEWS ON SCHOOLING SYSTEM	Dislikes About School System
MOTHER'S IMPRESSIONS OF VISITED SCHOOLS	Positive Impressions
	Negative Impressions
STUDENTS OFFERING INFORMATION ABOUT VARIOUS SCHOOLS	Students' Suggestions/ Advice
	Mother's Reaction to Given Information
	Montessori's Origin Story told by one of the students
VIEWS ON DISCRIMINATION AND DISCIMINATION EXPERIENCES	Insecurities held by the parent with regards to her family facing discrimination
	Experiences after the Quebec City Bombing
	Solidarity within Community (People of Color)
	Views on Race/ Discrimination
PARENTING	Parenting Approach
	Approach on Raising Children: to avoid prejudice and Discriminating others

Codebook: **Be-teacher interview**	
Themes	Value codes
CHILD'S ATTACHMENTS	Child's attachment to nursery
	Child's attachment to mother
	Child's attachment to father
	Child's attachment to teachers
	Child's attachment to grandmother
	Child's attachment to extended family
CHILD'S INTERACTIONS	Child's interactions with other children
	Interactions with animals
	Promoting social interaction
CHILD'S CHARACTERISTICS	Child's personality
	Child's way of dealing with his emotions
	Routine
	Reassurance through communication
GOALS	Mother's goals for child
SCHOOL	Child's preparedness for going to school

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

	Plans for school
PARENT'S VIEWS ON SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT	Desired type of involvement
	Dislikes about schools' functioning

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Appendix I: Data source by research question answered

Research focus	Question	Method (Data source)
I. parents' perspectives	Q1: parents' perspectives	1. parents' individual interviews 2. mock parent-teacher interviews 3. class discussion on diversity 4. parents' focus group 5. parents' demographic info
	Q2: impact of nursery and course on parents' perspectives	Parents' individual interviews
II. Pre-service teachers perspectives	Q3: evolution of pre-service teachers' views	1. Student focus group I & II 2. pre- and post-questionnaires 3. students' demographic info 4. Reflective responses
	Q4 impact of course on pre-service teachers' perceived preparedness	1. pre- and post- questionnaires 2. class discussion on diversity

Appendix J: Overview of themes by data source for each parent

	Data source	Be		Sa		Ss			Na		Ca	Overall	
		Ind Int	P-T Int	Ind Int	Class disc	Ind Int	P-T Int	focus gr (P)	Ind Int	P-T Int	Ind Int	Class disc	Focus group
Study Context	Nursery description	X		X		X	X			X	X		
	Nursery parents	X	X							X			X
	Nursery fit			X		X	X				X		
	Changes desired			X		X					X		
	Nursery educators	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		
	Communication at nursery	X		X		X			X		X		
	Parental involvement at nursery								X	X			X
	Course description	X		X		X				X			
	Students	X		X		X				X	X		
Q 1: parents' views	Parent Involvement	X	X						X	X	X		X
	Parent-teacher communication	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X
	Parent-teacher relationship	X		X		X			X		X		X
	Triangle relationship	X											X
	Barriers	X		X	X				X		X	X	
	Racism/ discrimination				X	X	X					X	X
	Expectations of teachers	X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Expectations of school						X						X
Q 2: impact	Nursery impact	X					X		X		X		
	Course impact	X		X		X							
	Finding a school	X	X	X		X	X						

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Other interests	Concerns about school transition	X	X	X									
	Schooling system	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
	Alternative schools	X		X	X		X		X	X		X	
	Advice for teachers						X		X				
	Diversity in the classroom				X							X	

Appendix K: Themes by data source for pre-service teachers

Data source	Themes
Focus groups	Parent-teacher relationships
	Parental engagement
	Diversity in the classroom
Questionnaires	Parental engagement
	Teacher's role and responsibilities towards families
	What constitutes good teaching
Class discussion	Teaching cultural diversity in a diverse classroom
	Communicating with diverse parents
Reflective answers	Interacting with diverse parents
	Impact of personal tendencies, values, and skills on interactions with parents

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Appendix L: List and frequency of emerging themes by research question for each questionnaire

Q1: In your opinion, what constitutes good teaching?

Themes in PRE:
Teaching style (21) [Being flexible to student's uniqueness]: Child-centered curriculum (3),
      Considering student's uniqueness/needs, individualized approach (9), Flexible teaching
      (9)
Showing care and support to students (19)
academic success (12)
Teacher's personal characteristics (11): Open-mindedness (7), Passionate teaching (4),
Teacher's skills (6): Resourcefulness (1), Continuous learning (1), Knowledgeable (3),
      Organization (1)
Respect for students and families (3)
Collaborating with parents (2)
Role model for children (1)
Equal treatment (1)

Themes in POST:
Showing care and support (19)
Teaching style (18): [Being flexible to student's uniqueness + others]: Facilitate learning (4),
      Accommodating (3), Encourage critical thinking in students (2), Encourage creativity (2),
      Considering student's uniqueness (4), Flexibility in teaching (3)]
Teacher's personal characteristics (12): Passion about teaching (4), Open-mindedness (8)
Teacher's skills (6): Continuous learning (2), Knowledge (4)
Communication with parents (5)
Respect in general (3)
Accessibility 1
academic success (1)

Q2: According to you, what are teachers' responsibilities towards children and their families?

Themes in PRE:
Showing care and support to students (10)
Inclusions of Parents (17): Communication with parents (9), including child's family (7),
integrating parents into the classroom (1)
academic success (7)
Teacher personal characteristics (7): *Open-mindedness in general*, integration in the classroom
      in general, welcoming in general, and acceptance in general – not necessarily toward
      parents
Teaching style: Considering student's uniqueness/needs/individualized approach (4)
Making environment safe (3)
Show respect in general (2)
Passionate teacher (1)

Themes in POST:
Inclusions of Parents (21): Communication (8), Welcoming parents (5), *Open-mindedness/flexibility toward parents* (5), partnerships with families (2), facilitate resources supporting family growth (1)
academic success (11)
Showing care and support to students => Being kind and understanding towards children (7)
Respecting Diversity (6)
Teaching style (5): Flexibility in teaching (3), Treat students uniquely (2)
Deep relationship with students (3)
Safety (3)
Respect in general (2)
Accessibility (1)

Q3: As a teacher, how do you expect the parents of the children you teach to be engaged?

Themes in PRE:
Helping child at home (9)
Presence at school/help school (8)
Communication with teacher (8)
Parental engagement depending on context (6)
Be informed (6)
Showing care and support to students (4)
Partnership (4)
Flexible (1)
No expectation of involvement (1)
Do what is best for child (1)

Themes in POST:
Presence at school/help school (14)
Starting/maintaining communication with teachers (10)
Barriers to parental communication (5)
Help child at home (3)
Showing care and support to the child (2)
Trust teacher partnership (2)
Try their best/want their best for their child (2)
Respect for dedication (1)

Q4: In your opinion, what are some of the reasons that may hold parents back from becoming engaged with the school and/or teachers?

Themes in PRE:
Busy work and home life (13)
Unease in opening up to teacher/teacher factor (10)

HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Diversity: cultural/language/SES barriers (10)
Unwelcome/not allowed in school (6)
Lack of interest in school (3)
Not knowing how to engage (1)
Teacher not engaging (1)

Themes in POST:
Busy work and home life (Entire lifestyle 8, Time 6, Health issues 4, work issues 4) = 22
Diversity: Language and Cultural barriers (11)
Conflict with teacher (Conflict with teacher 5, overstepping teacher's authority 4) = 9
Lack of feeling welcome in school (4)
Lack of interest (2)
Lack of knowledge (2)