

Preservice Teachers' Memories of Home-School Connections and their Link to Anticipated Practices

Kyle Elizabeth Miller
Illinois State University, Illinois
USA

ABSTRACT: Connecting with families is now a key professional role for teachers and supports student success in the classroom. This article presents an examination of elementary education preservice teachers' anticipated work with families and how their memories of school intersect with those anticipated practices. A qualitative research design incorporated open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with twenty-five preservice teachers. An inductive analysis using grounded theory techniques led to the identification of four main themes: (1) "involved" parents show up at school, (2) technology is a strategy to modernize work with families, (3) field-based experiences reinforce anticipated practices, and (4) institutionalized practices are the practices that count. Each theme connected to participants' memories of school, and anticipated practices reflected traditional one-way efforts embedded in their school histories. Implications are discussed for teacher educators.

Keywords: home-school connections, preservice teachers, teacher biographies, memories of school

Introduction

One difficulty in changing the way teachers do things may be that our educational system self-replicates: a new generation of teachers inherits the last generation's classroom practices. These new teachers, in turn, enter the system with beliefs and experiences similar to those of their predecessors and continue teaching the way they were taught (Willis & Sujo de Montes, 2002, p. 76).

This quotation exposes one of the most difficult challenges that teacher preparation programs face. Preservice teachers enter teaching programs with 13 years of school experiences as students, and those 15,000 hours of memories serve as a powerful compass for students' future actions as classroom teachers (Fragnoli, 2005; Lortie, 1975; MacPhee & Sanden, 2016; Pajares, 1992). The memories serve as a filter through which preservice teachers interpret, reject, and/or accept information presented in their coursework (Balli, 2011). This is especially true for practices related to families and how preservice teachers plan to connect with students' caregivers (Graue, 2005; Graue & Brown, 2003; Winder & Corter, 2016). As preservice teachers prospectively reflect on how they will interact and build relationships with students' families, memories are reactivated and inform their decision-making.

Connecting with families is now a key professional role for teachers and is therefore a high priority topic for supporting successful schools and classrooms (Amatea, 2013; Danielson, 2011;). The purpose of this study is to examine how preservice teachers anticipate working with students' families and how their memories of connections between families and schools inform future actions in the classroom. Preservice teachers were asked to retrospectively reflect on memories of home-school connections when they were students and prospectively reflect on their future role in the classroom and cultivating partnerships with families. One broad question and several sub-questions guided this study:

- 1.) How do elementary education preservice teachers anticipate connecting with students' families as classroom teachers?
 - a.) What contributes to preservice anticipated connections with families?
 - b.) How do personal memories of home-school connections contribute to their anticipated connections with families?

Building on the literature base of preparing teachers to work with families, which is largely theoretical (Evans, 2013), this study draws attention to the memories of preservice teachers [PSTs], an understudied and underemphasized aspect of teacher education research (Miller & Shifflet, 2016).

Literature Review

Families and Home-School Connections

Research continues to highlight the meaningful contributions that families make to children's educational success (Epstein, 2013; Hill & Craft, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; Mapp, 2003; Taylor, Clayton & Rowley, 2004; Weiss et al, 2003). The consensus is that families matter. With that understanding, most schools reject the paradigm that schools and homes should operate in isolation and instead, that families and schools must collaborate to support student success (Amatea, 2013). The paradigm of collaboration celebrates the knowledge and resources of both the school and the family, as they come together to set goals and support student achievement.

This study adopts the term 'home-school connections' to explore PSTs' hypothesized interactions with families, which comprehensively includes the full range of interactions between families and schools (Jensen, 2006). While the terms 'family involvement' and 'family engagement' are popular, they allude to a power indifference where schools create opportunities for families (Amatea, 2013). Family involvement is often defined as familial participation in prescribed events, which typically take place at the school (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Jeynes, 2013); whereas family engagement moves beyond traditional notions of involvement to encourage family members to become partners with the school by listening to family needs and perspectives (Ferlazzo, 2011). However both terms have faced criticism for remaining school-directed, and research continues to encourage scholars to move beyond current interpretations of these terms and what it means to effectively work with families (Baker et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2013; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Historically, families have resided on the receiving end of school-initiated efforts, such as newsletters, advice, and family contracts (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). This type of one-way communication places schools and teachers in the role of experts who should share knowledge with families to improve student outcomes (Allen, 2006). The term *connections* refers to a full spectrum of informal and institutionalized practices, from an

unplanned conversation to an annual open house (Miller, Dilworth-Bart, & Hilgendorf, 2014). In order to critically examine PSTs' anticipated practices with families, this study's term, home-school connections, allows for a more holistic view and understanding of the phenomenon.

As reflected in the many terms used to describe work with families, schools often assume the lead role in these interactions and connections do not reflect the paradigm of collaboration. The historic and ritualized nature of these interactions characterizes the school as the *knower* and the family as the *learner*; this divide becomes even more pronounced for families from lower-socioeconomic and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Amatea, Chowela, & Mixon, 2012; Doucet & Tudge, 2007). Families are viewed as lacking the pedagogical and social-emotional knowledge needed for students' success (Doucet, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004), and schools therefore must share their practices and knowledge with families to improve or enhance family inputs. Families are consciously or unconsciously placed on a continuum of having the most to learn to having the least to learn from schools based on their social and cultural position in society (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

Counter to deficit thinking, and placing families on a continuum, is to focus on the existing resources and contributions of families through a strengths-based perspective. The value in developing a positive disposition toward families and viewing the family unit through a strengths-based lens is well-documented (Amatea, Mixon, & McCarthy, 2012; Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006; Baker et al., 2016; Ramirez, McCollough, & Diaz, 2016). The perspective that families possess intimate and essential knowledge of students that can help teachers become better educators continues to grow (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; McIntyre, Roseberry, & Gonzalez, 2001; Moll, 2015). Therefore, being an effective teacher requires the skills to recognize and build upon the knowledge and contributions of families and to recognize the family unit as co-experts on the child (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). This mindset must begin in teacher education programs.

Teacher Education Programs

As previously stated, the behaviors observed in schools do not appear to reflect the current paradigm of collaboration. Although scholars have assertively questioned and cautioned against traditional, unilateral, home-school connections, schools still find themselves entrenched in one-way efforts (Allen, 2006; Graue & Sherfinski, 2011; Stefanski et al., 2016). Given the mounting evidence that high quality and inclusive home-school relationships yield positive

outcomes for students, it becomes paramount that teachers perceive relationships with families as both desirable and essential. This must begin during preservice training when students begin to internalize practices (LaBoskey & Richert, 2002; Winder & Corter, 2016). It may seem that students entering the field of teaching would have an open and accepting disposition for working with families, but many PSTs lack confidence and clear expectations to create effective partnerships with families (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). This presents a challenge, but also an opportunity, for teacher educators to help students develop positive dispositions toward working with a diverse range of families (Baum & Swick, 2008; Ramirez et al., 2016). The extent to which a teacher understands families and their professional role in building relationships contributes to a prepared and competent educator (Amatea, 2013; Vorbeck & Miller Marsh, 2008).

Research defends the role of coursework in helping PSTs develop the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively connect with families (Abrego, Rubin, & Sutterby, 2006; Amatea, Cholewa, & Mixon, 2012; Blasi, 2002; Early & Winton, 2001; Hampshire, Havercroft, Luy, & Call, 2015). Courses that focus exclusively on partnering with families can reduce negative assumptions about families (Amatea et al., 2012), and immersive experiences with families can increase PSTs' self-efficacy and motivation to work with families (Kim & Taylor, 2016). However, most teacher education programs offer limited curricular content related to families and even less real-world experiences (Mutton, Burn, & Thompson, 2018). For programs that claim to include content on families, it is often a few sessions within diversity or foundational courses (Amatea et al., 2012; Turner-Vorbeck, 2005), and most teachers enter classrooms feeling underprepared to connect with families (Evans, 2013; Winder & Corter, 2016).

Memories of School

To adequately prepare teachers for the field requires a conscious and critical examination of their personal histories—their memories of school. Memories of school are powerful (DePalma, Membiela, & Pazos, 2011; Fragnoli, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Even the seemingly distant memory of starting kindergarten is often recalled as a notable memory in the educational trajectory of one's life course (Turunen, Dockett, & Perry, 2015). Memories of school can be classified as positive, negative or neutral as individuals continue to revisit and make sense of these storied events (Miller & Dilworth-Bart, 2014). As students are in the process

of making memories of school, families and teachers carry their memories with them. At times they seek out these memories and at times they are unintentionally reactivated. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) refers to these memories as “ghosts” that continue to follow us as throughout the years, and even haunt us at times when one’s present circumstances remind us of the past.

Research has identified a link between teachers’ memories of school and current or future practices. Memories guide classroom management strategies (DePalma et al., 2011), teaching methods they view as effective (Fagnoli, 2005; MacPhee & Sanden, 2016; Scott, 2005), teacher dispositions they actively resist (Miller, 2017; Miller & Shifflet, 2016), visions of the ‘iconic teacher’ they hope to become (Cook, 2009), and perceptions of themselves as teachers (Flores & Day, 2006). While memories can inspire and motivate teachers, they also serve as a filter through which all new information is sifted. In fact, memories can hinder teachers’ openness to new ideas or practices if they overly trust what was most memorable from their schooling (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Hudson, Usak, Fancovicova, & Prokop, 2010). Without prompting, teachers do not always realize that their experiences are context-specific and may not effectively translate to other students or the changing landscape of classrooms (Kaya, 2018).

Much of the research to support the connection between the past and the present for future teachers stems from courses involving preservice teachers (e.g., Fagnoli, 2005; MacPhee & Sanden, 2016; Miller & Shifflet, 2016). Based on instructors’ conceptual understanding of the impact of memories, some instructors engage in memory work to help preservice teachers recognize the power of their memories on their future decisions as classroom teachers. For example, MacPhee and Sanden (2016) required students to create a literacy timeline of their experiences in school and reflect on how those memories motivated them to engage in or avoid certain literacy practices. Similarly, Fagnoli (2005) asked preservice teachers to examine their pre-existing conceptions of social studies education through ongoing journal entries that explored memories of school. However, it remains unclear how often memory work focuses on families, especially given the limited attention family content receives in teacher education.

Few studies have focused on the intersection of preservice teachers’ memories of school and anticipated work with families. Two studies involving preservice teachers found that memories of highly involved parents were linked to viewing families as knowledgeable (Winder & Corter, 2016) and having positive attitudes towards families (Denessen, Baker, Kloppenburg, & Kerkhof, 2009). Graue and Brown’s (2003) and Graue’s (2005) studies of preservice teachers’

visions of home-school relations revealed that preservice teachers' biographical experiences limited their anticipated practices with families and created images of 'problem parents' (over-involved and absent). Elements of their family's experiences, positive and negative, underpinned their imagined futures of relationships with families, with an emphasis on non-collaborative activities. This limited body of research suggests that our memories lead to mental models of how the social world should operate. In turn, these mental models guide our actions with and beliefs about families, and "we seldom question their accuracy" (Amatea, 2013, p. 20).

Theoretical Perspective

The first theoretical premise of this study is that of a family's cultural capital. Cultural capital proposes that when the cultural norms of a family match those of a school, that family, and subsequently the child, are given an educational advantage (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). Scholars suggest that traditional practices involving families are part of an entrenched system that caters to a mainstream model of home-school connections founded on White, middle-class practices (Crozier & Davies, 2007; de Carvalho, 2001; Patte, 2011). Schools are cultural spaces, as educators bring personal ideas and beliefs founded on their lived experiences and backgrounds (Delgado Gaitan, 2012). Children from higher-socioeconomic [SES] backgrounds commonly acquire the culture of schools within their families, which gives them the skills and knowledge that are desired by schools (Gracia, 2015).

Cultural practices and behaviors are not fixed and move in time with historical and societal changes. However, middle and upper-class families are often in a more privileged position to adapt home-based activities and behaviors in response to new expectations or demands of schools (Lareau, 2003; Roksa & Potter, 2011). Families may be involved in a myriad of nontraditional ways outside of the school walls, but those interactions may not be counted as 'involvement' or viewed as beneficial to children's development through practitioners' perspectives (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). School conceptions of what it means to be an engaged and invested family typically become a laundry list of what counts as good and acceptable based on teachers' personal biographies, and schools hold the power in applying that list to families (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St Loius, & George, 2004).

Families' participation in children's education has been constructed in a way that privileges the norms and expectation of White, middle-class populations from a traditional family structure (Doucet & Tudge, 2007). This may explain why middle-class families are more

likely to actively engage with children's schooling (Levine-Rasky, 2009), and may also reflect the memories of many preservice teachers who match that demographic. Constraining the definition of what it means to be an involved or engaged parent often has the unintended consequence of failing to consider the needs, perspectives, and offerings of many ethnically or structurally diverse families (Crozier & Davies, 2007). This leads us to why it is important to consider home-school connections through a cultural capital lens and to think about how the structure of schools and perceptions of preservice teachers may create inequities in home-school connections.

The second theoretical premise of this study is Lortie's (1975) *Apprenticeship of Observation*. Preservice teachers have logged approximately 15,000 hours of classroom observations during their K-12 schooling. Those hours of observation lead to the dangerous assumption that they know how classrooms function and the role of the teacher (Kaya, 2018; Mahijos & Maxson, 1995). Lortie suggests that preservice teachers may unconsciously internalize their K-12 observations as effective teaching without questioning the intent or contextualized nature of what they observed. There is a growing awareness in teacher education that those memories must be directly examined in order to disrupt ineffective cycles of teaching (Browning, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Without unpacking those memories or recognizing how those memories inform their predispositions toward teaching, PSTs are likely to imitate those behaviors, including interactions with families. For example, Graue's (2005) research with elementary education preservice teachers demonstrated that observed practices in one's biography shape dispositions toward families and expectations of their roles in school. *Apprenticeship of Observation* can help explain how family-oriented practices become institutionalized in school, and why teachers continue to adopt practices that might not work for the changing demographic and needs of families.

Methods

A qualitative research design was adopted to answer the guiding question: How do elementary education preservice teachers envision connecting with students' families as classroom teachers? The interpretivist design was founded on the premise that research is never purely objective and that multiple realities can exist (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, to explore this topic, it required that information be gathered inductively from preservice teachers to understand the direct experience of individuals and their unique situations

(Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Additionally, based on the theoretical framework of cultural capital, a critical lens accompanied the analysis and interpretation of data. Components of Grounded Theory methodology were selected to align with the interpretivist paradigm and allowed for a critical interpretation of latent content (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Participants

All elementary education majors at a large teacher preparation program in the Midwest were invited to participate in the study. A total of 25 preservice teachers volunteered to participate, and the sample was purposefully stratified to include participants from freshman to seniors as a way to examine the potential influence of coursework or field experiences on responses. The student sample mirrored typical demographic trends for teacher education programs, with the majority of participants identifying as White, female, and middle class from suburban settings (Amatea et al., 2012). The majority of participants identified as female (88%) and White (76%); while 12% identified as male, 4% African American, 12% Latino/a, and 8% multi-racial. Thirty-six percent of the participants held freshman or sophomore status and had only completed general education courses, 36% were juniors enrolled in their elementary education required courses, and 28% were enrolled in student teaching. The majority of students attended K-12 public schools (84%), and 16% attended private schools as students.

Data Collection

Data included a pre-interview questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with the principal investigator. The questionnaire and interview asked participants to describe their anticipated practices for connecting with families, followed by an exploration of previous life experiences, school memories, and current coursework that contributed to notions of family connections. First, students recorded the strategies and/or approaches they plan to take with families as classroom teachers on the questionnaire. Second, participants recorded all of the strategies they recalled schools and teachers using to connect with their families. The questionnaire also asked participants to write about a school memory of home-school connections, based on the theoretical position that memories of observed practices create the filter through which new ideas are measured and adopted (Lortie, 1975). The semi-structured interview covered the same topics but allowed students to share their ideas verbally and extend responses from the questionnaire with researcher-generated probes. Interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. There is much value in asking students to “look back” and to “look forward” through written and oral data collection strategies (Conway, 2001), and the triangulation of these strategies increased the trustworthiness of the study (Robson, 2002).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began after the first interview and continued throughout the data collection process. First, content analysis was used to categorize participants' written responses on the pre-interview questionnaire of remembered practices and anticipated practices with families. The content analysis allowed for a systematic coding of listed home-school connection strategies with a goal to report on the frequency of the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Each strategy was tallied and then clustered into more inclusive descriptive titles. For example, ‘family carnival,’ ‘family fun nights,’ and ‘end of the year family celebration’ were grouped into *Family Night*. Second, interview transcripts were thematically analyzed through an open-axial-selective coding process using techniques from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Transcripts were reviewed line by line and codes were assigned to each new idea identified through a chunking procedure of content that fit together (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Open codes were then compared across transcripts to develop a working codebook where codes were labeled and defined with examples (Boyatzis, 1998). The codebook served as a working document to recode the transcripts more systematically and reconfigure codes hierarchically through axial coding. Two researchers coded the transcripts independently and then compared codes until reaching consensus. Based on the ongoing process of coding and interrogation of data, the most frequent and meaningful themes were identified and compared across participants through a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These manifest themes resulted from the analysis of surface level data and reflected what participants explicitly stated in interviews (Boyatzis, 1998; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Peer debriefings with an undergraduate student completing an independent research project helped to identify the selective coding of the data and determine the more latent storyline of study. The latent coding focused on the deeper, underlying messages in the data, which emerged through research memos and collaborative meetings (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). NVivo12 was used to assist the data management and analysis.

Findings

The content analysis of the questionnaire led to a numeric representation of participants’ memories and future plans in the classroom. Table 1 provides those findings to partially answer the study’s primary question of how PSTs envision future home-school connections and the second subquestion related to the role of school memories. The table shows that teacher-initiated newsletters, notes, and emails were the most commonly recalled strategies and were also the most frequently named strategies reported in participants’ plans for the future.

Table 1: Participant Memories and Plans

Strategy	Looking Back	Looking Back	Looking Forward
	Memory of practice	Most commonly used by teachers	Plan for classroom
Conferences	25 (100%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)
Newsletters	22 (88%)	14 (56%)	19 (76%)
Notes/emails	22 (88%)	17 (68%)	16 (64%)
Phone calls/texts	13 (52%)	3 (12%)	12 (48%)
Blog/website/app	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	8 (32%)
Family night	17 (68%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
Parent helper	18 (72%)	2 (8%)	8 (32%)
Assignment notebook	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Behavior log	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)

The thematic analysis of interview data identified four major manifest themes to more comprehensively answer the study’s primary question and subquestions: (1) Involved parents are at the school; (2) Same practice, electronic format; (3) Field based experiences reinforced anticipated practices; and (4) Informal versus institutionalized practices. The latent, selective theme was ‘the illusion of progress.’ Participants viewed their ideas as fresh and innovative, even

though they were recycling practices from their past. Findings support that participants' memories of teachers' interactions with families strongly guided their future plans as classroom teachers. The first theme captured the responses of memories that emphasized parents being in classrooms and at school events as 'involvement.' The second theme reflected participants' desires to use many of the practices they observed as students, but to modernize the practice with technology. The third theme emerged from responses that referenced clinical experiences and internships as spaces that reinforced their plans to use traditional family involvement strategies. The fourth theme raised questions over what counted as recognized efforts to work with families. The manifest themes are listed below with quotations as evidence.

Involved Parents are at the School

Students repeatedly described involvement through the lens of physically showing up at school and events, as well as meeting with teachers. Interestingly, the recruitment materials, pre-interview questionnaire, and interview script used the terms "connections" and "working with families" and purposefully did not incorporate the word involvement. However, participants repeatedly employed the term "involvement" when describing their memories and anticipated practices. The majority of participants labeled their parents as "involved" because they regularly communicated with teachers, served as classroom moms or chaperoned field trips. Only three participants categorized their parents as uninvolved, and it was qualified by explaining that they had work conflicts and could not attend school events. One participant shared:

My mom was a class mom and helped out in the classroom. I would like to do something like that in my classroom. Where I grew up, if your mom wasn't a class mom, it was like, "well, what in the hell is she doing then?" I know it's important, and I will just explain to parents that it's important to be involved. Most parents like to do that stuff.

As demonstrated by this participant, there is an underlying assumption that showing up at the school meant that the parents were invested in their child's education. Similarly, a participant recalled the regular classroom visits from her father, "He would be like a chaperone and come visit and bring snacks. All my classmates loved him and called him Papi." She later added, "This is how I want to be in my classroom; I want to create a space where parents feel welcome and can just show up. Many of my peers are intimidated by parents, but I want them around." Like

these examples, almost all participants desired to create events and opportunities for parents to attend school functions or volunteer in the classroom.

Another participant recalled:

There were a lot of field trips and fun little parties. We had, like, Halloween parties, Valentine's day, St. Patrick's Day.... Even the things that weren't really holidays, they would make it a holiday so that you could have a party.

She later reflected, "I want to do something similar. Who doesn't like a good party? I want parents to feel welcome in my room, and I know my mom really liked being a helper and being in my classroom. I think that is important." This notion of a welcoming classroom and having an open-door policy with families was consistent across interviews. Participants expressed an excitement to meet and work with families, and the classroom should serve as that space to build those relationships.

Two participants did not contribute to this theme and sentiment that involvement should occur at the school. One participant expressed annoyance as she recalled the days of mothers helping with fundraisers and classroom parties. "Look, my parents were not your typical PTA parents. They worked a lot. They cared, but they worked a lot. I'm not sure everyone gets that." The other participant explained that a household with four children required a strict routine to get everything accomplished, and her family did not have the luxury of time to attend family events. These participants did not label their parents as uninvolved, rather rejected the ritualized practices of school-based involvement. These participants assumed they would offer these types of classroom-based opportunities for parents who were interested but would never judge parents who could not volunteer during the day or at afterschool events.

Same Practice, Electronic Format

Students spoke about their desire to continue many practices their teachers utilized with parents; however, they planned to modernize the practices by making them web-based or electronic. Newsletters were the top strategy that students recalled and planned to replicate in their classroom, followed by sending home individual notes. Newsletters were also named as the only concrete strategy learned from their coursework, as one course assignment asked students to write a newsletter for parents. Participants noted that society has changed and although they believed the strategy was effective, they wanted to make it more relevant with the use of

technology. Latently embedded in this theme was the *illusion of progress*. Participants envisioned creating blogs or webpages to share the information often contained in newsletters and to send home emails rather than handwritten notes. Participants viewed the use of technology as new and innovative. A PST explained:

I really like the idea of using newsletters. We used to get those on, like, a weekly basis. It is a way to let families know what you are doing or even what they could do at home. I think my parents really liked getting those. I would probably do this but like with a blog or email it to parents.

While participants perceived newsletters as the best mode to communicate curricular and academic information, many anticipated that communication with parents would be related to student behavior. Participants recalled teachers calling home to communicate those concerns. However, they had discovered new digitally-based ways through clinical experiences and younger siblings to accomplish the same task, such as the app called Class Dojo, which allowed them to share classroom news and behavior updates immediately with parents through a phone or ipad.

One participant recognized that digital forms of communication might place some students at a disadvantage. She recalled a memory with her father that referenced the digital divide.

When I was in elementary school, I remember I had to type something once and we had a computer. I was able to type it, but my dad couldn't get over the fact that if you didn't have a computer, what would you do? And me and my mom were like, ok, there's the library. I just kept trying to think of a way, but it seemed unfair. Well, what if you didn't [have a computer]? You couldn't do this; you couldn't do that. I would love to do an online newsletter through email, but I would also like a paper copy to go home.

Her father's prompt helped her recognize an inequity in the assigned homework, and that memory is now the filter through which she thinks about communication with families. This was the only participant who noted the digital divide and access to technology; other participants viewed technology as the most practical and family-desired mode of communication.

Field-Based Experiences Reinforced Anticipated Practices

Relationships with cooperating teachers through internships, clinical experience, and student teaching helped participants to further commit to their anticipated practices of family relationships by seeing the strategy in a classroom. Even for freshman and sophomore students who had not participated in university-supervised clinical experiences, they all reported involvement in high-school based internships with preschools and K-12 schools that exposed them to real world teaching practices. Participants observed many one-way communication strategies that reminded them of their own schooling experience. One participant described a practice she observed in her clinical experience:

She [the teacher] had an agenda book and she would put a sticker on it for parents to show them their child's behavior. So, if the parent saw the green they know they had a good day. And if it was red then she would write a little note as to why. I've seen that used during my clinicals [field-based experiences], and it seems to work.

This theme also overlapped with the previous theme of modernizing traditional practices, as some of their cooperating teachers embraced digital practices. Witnessing a licensed teacher use a practice with students and families reinforced the belief that it was an effective practice. One participant stated:

My cooperating teacher posts everything to a website so that parents can look at it whenever. I think that's what I will do, too. It is like the idea of sending home a newsletter, but just easier to get to and you don't have to trust that your students will take it home.

Similarly, another participant echoed the same sentiment:

I noticed when I was doing my observations that one teacher did this blog type of thing. It was some website to let the parents go on all the time and, like, keep it updated. I think that's a really cool idea especially like with technology now. Everything's online.

Participants viewed technology as a *strategy* that teachers used, rather than a *tool* they used to continue established practices. Again, it reinforced the latent notion that what they observed must represent progress in home-school connections.

One participant did not contribute to this theme and questioned some of the practices she observed in the field. She reflected on her two years of observations and clinical experiences and the movement to digitalize classrooms and work with families. She stated, "I'm not a huge fan of email, and sometimes texts do not get read the right way. Blogs might be fine, but I would rather just have a 30-second conversation. Thirty seconds can go a long way." She later referred to herself as "old fashioned" when it came to working with families because she did not plan on using the new forms of technology displayed by teachers in the field. This participant was the exception to the larger sample.

Based on literature in the field, it was expected that coursework would be named as a contributing factor on anticipated practices. When comparing upper and lower-level students and the reported influence of coursework, there was no notable difference. On the open-ended questionnaire, upper-level students named between two and four courses that integrated content on families. During the interviews, participants did not discuss the impact of their coursework until they were prompted by the interviewer. Participants reported that the perceived message from the family-related content was that they should expect a diverse range of families and need to keep an open mind.

With the exception of the newsletter, which was described earlier, coursework did not contribute to anticipated practices with families. One participant said, "I would say I feel prepared to work with families only because of my work experience with [name of school district] as a tutor. As far as my classes here, they haven't prepared me to work with families." This quotation is indicative of participant responses. Freshman and sophomore participants had not received content related to families but assumed they would before graduation. Instead, they relied on prior work experiences or high school internships to reinforce their selected strategies. Juniors and seniors regretted the lack of skills and knowledge gained through coursework and relied on field-based experiences to reinforce anticipated practices with families.

Informal Versus Institutionalized Practices

As interviews progressed from more formal practices, such as conferences and newsletters, participants shared memories of parents engaging in informal conversations with their K-12 teachers. They described these as the most meaningful in that they were personalized and related to their individual success in the classroom. However, participants who described this personal communication also questioned if it "counted." As shared in the above theme, one

participant believed that even a short conversation carries more value than other types of connections but was not sure how she would actually document it as proof that she is involving families in her classroom. Like this participant, many wondered if an informal conversation was a “thing” in working with families, an actual practice. Although participants envisioned these conversations occurring and recognized them as meaningful, they questioned if they could be part of their *plan*, since these anticipated moments are often unpredictable and might not involve all students. A few participants had observed this practice during summer jobs at early childhood centers but had not encountered these conversations at the elementary level. One can assume they might occur outside of the school day and were, therefore, not reinforced as an actual practice or part of a teacher’s efforts.

Drawing on the data from the questionnaire, participants described these informal connections of allowing time to talk with their parent in their open-ended memories. For example, one participant wrote a story about her mother building a lifelong friendship with her first grade teacher and how positively it impacted her experience in school. However, when listing the ways their teachers connected with families, conversations or creating dialogues with families were not named. Data appeared to reflect an application of the “laundry list” of what activities count in working with families.

Discussion

Examining Memories

The findings from this study call attention to how family content is covered in teacher education courses. The reflective activities used in this study could be integrated into students’ coursework as a form of intervention by acknowledging Lortie’s (1975) *apprenticeship of observation* concept. Exploring student memories of school is one avenue of reflection to explore and disentangle the past. The reflective exercise of ‘looking back’ and ‘looking forward’ can allow students to critically review their autobiographies in order to disrupt and transform the cycle of reproduction in teaching (Conway, 2001; Gomez et al., 2000). Considering the majority of preservice teachers come from a White and middle-class background, their memories inspire the use of practices that privilege certain families and constrain the definition of what it means to be involved or care about a child’s education (Bourdieu, 1986; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Gracia, 2015). For example, a family that does not show up to events might be viewed as disinterested or

uninvolved; when in reality, it might signify that they trust the school and their distance is a sign of respect for teachers and their role in children's learning. However, personal narratives, and the mental models that result from those narratives, might lead to an erroneous assumption about the family.

Exploring preservice teachers' autobiographies should serve as the initial step in creating new methods for getting to know and effectively connect with families (Graue, 2005; Graue & Brown, 2003; Winder & Corter, 2016). The power of memories, when unexamined, can reinforce existing biases, assumptions, and inequitable practices. DePalma et al. (2011) even suggest that analyzing memories holds the potential to reduce teacher burnout, as teachers can begin to analyze and question what they recall from their schooling. By drawing attention to institutionalized practices that have become accepted as the norm, teachers can critique and negotiate these recalled practices in order to make more effective decisions regarding families, in turn, making connections with families less stressful or distant.

Hankins (2003) describes how teachers and parents can collaborate to examine family pasts and subsequently imagine new futures for students. By critically examining and reflecting on stories, individuals begin to see their current behaviors from a new angle and identify the interconnectedness between the past and present. Hankins writes, "When teachers, parents, and students share their stories, empathize, and work together toward a common goal, we can rewrite children's stories, replacing the "expected" endings with ones that inspire others to see children and families as partners" (p. 22). This process can disrupt the mental models of home-school connections that teachers bring to the classroom and helps to challenge the notion that a one-size-fits all approach with families will work in today's classrooms (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Graue, 2005; Stefanski et al., 2016).

One-Way Versus Two-Way Communication

This research illuminates the influence that previous experiences can expend on future teaching practices. Not surprisingly, memories of one-way communication, such as newsletters, transcended into participants' anticipated plans. Over a decade after Graue's (2005) study with preservice teachers, this study identified a similar finding that most imagined interactions were unilateral. The teacher and school were viewed as the experts and must share that expertise with families, and that information should consistently flow from the school to home. This envisioned practice was reinforced by a course assignment and experiences with teachers in the field.

Historically, one-way communication has dominated schools' efforts to connect with families, where information flows from the school to the home (Allen, 2007; Moll, 2015). The traditional one-way model is built upon the premise that teachers are the experts and families are the passive party in need of assistance (Baum & Swick, 2008; Ramirez et al., 2016). It is founded on the assumption that the school knows something that the family does not and must be educated (Faber, 2015). The paradigm of *collaboration* was not reflected in participants' responses, instead anticipated connections aimed to remediate families' presumed lack of expertise (Amatea, 2013).

Several participants recalled the importance of informal conversations between teachers and parents but were hesitant to call it a practice and were unsure how to weave it into their anticipated practices. However, time dedicated to authentic conversations is documented as an effective and meaningful strategy as it lends itself to two-way communication (Amatea, Chowela, & Mixon, 2012). Two-way communication allows for a flow of information both from the school to home and from the home to school, which reflects a more equal and balanced partnership. Scholars suggest that two-way communication is more instrumental in creating trust and respect between parents and teachers, because the bidirectional flow of information opens up communication to all parties and allows families to share what they know about their child (Baker et al., 2016; Olson & Hyson, 2005). However, it is less frequently established in school communities because schools continue to recycle the traditional one-way model as teachers are often underprepared to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with families (Allen, 2007; Evans, 2013; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). Seemingly, participants in this study were driven by institutionalized practices that seemed to count as home-school connections rather than preparing for the improvisation of teaching and those authentic, informal moments (Baker et al., 2016; Graue, 2005).

There was also a disconnect between participants' thinking about families and the behaviors they anticipated using with families. They expressed an openness to families and recognized that families are changing; however, prospective strategies to work with families fit a restricted definition of families and a one-size fits all approach. For example, one participant wrote on her questionnaire that she would connect with families in "any way possible." When she was asked to expand on her comment during the interview she struggled to identify any concrete strategies other than newsletters and emails. The vagueness and theoretical nature of

participants' coursework, coupled with observations of traditional strategies, seemed to thwart PSTs' originality and creativity in imagining future home-school connections and specifically two-way communication.

Implications

Implications of this study call for more attention to be directed toward clinical placements and authentic curricular experiences. As described in the findings, cooperating teachers play a key role in reinforcing preservice teachers' mental models of home-school connections. Clinical sites serve as a critical space for the development of attitudes toward families and adopting family-related practices. How preservice teachers are socialized for the field is important to consider in relationship with cooperating teachers and other school personnel who may consciously or unconsciously transfer attitudes and assumptions about families. While the knowledge and skills gained in students' courses are decontextualized, clinical experiences are contextualized and make a profound impact on the attitudes of future teachers. In fact, preservice teachers claim that their most influential moments come from field based experiences, where many outdated practices continue to be utilized (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002).

Schools still gravitate toward formalized practices such as newsletters and homework planners and view those activities as their link to families (Allen, 2007; Crozier & Davies, 2007). Those observed practices further assure PSTs that their anticipated strategies are school-endorsed and reflect progress or innovation in home-school connections. Districts could benefit greatly from professional development on two-way and culturally relevant connections with families; and in turn, it would benefit the preparation of PSTs for their future classrooms.

Previous studies suggest family-oriented coursework can disrupt or challenge students' worldviews or belief systems about home-school connections (Kintner-Duffy et al., 2012). However, theoretical and hypothetical discussions may not provide the scaffolding PSTs need to establish meaningful connections in the real world. Findings in this study call for more curricular opportunities that allow for *authentic* experiences with families in order to better understand families and challenge their current mental models of home-school connection (Kim & Taylor, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2016). Such experiences could include attending a family event, listening to a parent panel, interviewing a parent, or following a parent blog.

Additionally, the lack of curricular exposure to innovation in home-school connections can help to explain the recycling of traditional practices, as well as from a fear of being judged (Wanless, Patton, Rimm-Kaufman, & Deutsch, 2012) or believing these strategies are fixed and expected of teachers (Mutton, Burn, & Thompson, 2018). Therefore, programs should provide preservice teachers with a range of different settings and experiences to meet and engage with families (Kim & Taylor, 2016), possibly even outside of a typical teaching-learning environment to learn more innovative and culturally relevant practices from the field of social work or community-based programs (Stefanski et al., 2016). Clinical hours spent with social workers, family outreach workers, or after-school personnel can introduce preservice teachers to different perspectives, models of home-school connections, and strategies.

Limitations

Findings should be considered with an appreciation of their limitations. While multiple data sources were used to support triangulation, all data were generated from the perspective of preservice teachers. The data reflect perceptions of coursework and interpretation of classroom observations and clinical experiences. Adjusting the research design to include data from teacher educators and cooperating teachers would help to create a more comprehensive depiction of this phenomenon. Further, diversifying the sample to include more PSTs from different ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds can expand the findings of how PSTs from less privileged backgrounds fit with or challenge the identified findings in this study. Next steps for this line of inquiry include a follow-up study with participants as they enter the field as licensed classroom teachers. How are plans implemented or changed when met with the demands, supports and institutional culture of a real world setting?

Conclusion

As family partnerships become an essential and mandatory aspect of teaching (Epstein, 2013; Hyson, 2003), teacher preparation programs are increasing efforts to address this topic, which has historically lacked in most programs (Amatea et al., 2012). The current school rhetoric of “family partnerships” is a misnomer, as most connections with families tend to be one-sided and a one-size-fits all approach that is dictated by schools (Amatea, 2013; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Unexamined memories contribute to the recycling of one-sided practices as they become the default for activities with and attitudes toward families. Memories do not act in

Preservice teachers' memories

isolation and are reinforced by PSTs' coursework and field based experiences. Teacher education should help PSTs construct an understanding that technology is a tool, not a strategy, and digitalizing one-way connections is not progress. The consensus is that families matter, and they deserve a reinvention of traditional home-school connections to meaningfully collaborate with schools and teachers.

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