First-Year Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers: Challenges of Working With Parents

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Abstract

The significance of relationships between the parents and teachers of preschool and kindergarten children is well established. Teachers and schools are presumed to be responsible for lack of parent–teacher collaboration. Internationally, early childhood teacher education programs recognize this and offer courses related to parents and families. This study documented the views of preschool and kindergarten teachers in their first year of teaching, focusing on areas of concern about working with parents. This research utilizes the social exchange theory as its conceptual framework to examine if the absence of reciprocity from parents can result in problems for new teachers. Interviews conducted with 14 first-year teachers in New Zealand indicate that parental involvement remains challenging for early childhood teachers. The four constructs in the findings reflected the social exchange theory: lack of reciprocity, difficulties of building relationships, power-dependence, and social identity of early childhood teachers. The findings reveal that, despite the new teachers' efforts, some parents are not responsive. The successful functioning of this partnership requires active participation and willingness of not only the teachers but parents as well. Simply portraying the "ideal" image of a relationship that the new teacher should be establishing through preservice teacher education is inadequate. The rhetoric regarding parent–teacher relationships should reflect the reality of practice. To ensure the success of new teachers, the challenges of working with families should be part of the explicit discourse of teacher education.

Introduction

The importance of parent–teacher collaboration and its positive impact on children is well documented (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of 41 studies examined the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, confirming a strong association between them (Jeynes, 2005). The significance of this relationship between the parents and teachers of preschool and kindergarten children is even more crucial and has been propounded over a number of years (Honig, 1975; Powell, 2003). Research has shown that when parent–professional partnerships and family-centered practices are adopted, families are satisfied; additionally, parental beliefs about their own self-efficacy and empowerment increase (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). This understanding has led to the majority of international teacher education programs adopting standards related to working with families. In the USA, the standard requires teacher education programs to prepare candidates who can create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children's development and learning (NAEYC, 2011). In Australia, teachers are expected to engage professionally with parents, carers (caregivers), and the community (AITSL, 2011). The UK Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status stipulate that teachers recognize and respect the contribution that parents and carers can make to the development and well-being of children and young people (Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2008). The standard for graduating teachers in New Zealand is to have the knowledge and dispositions to work effectively with parents, caregivers, families, and communities (NZTC, 2007).

These standards have influenced the curricula of teacher education programs. Hence, most early childhood teacher education programs offer courses for working with parents and families. The schools and colleges of education advocate for and teach these courses, as research shows that constructive relationships between teachers and parents can contribute to children's learning and well-being at home and in the early childhood setting. Such relationships give young children a sense of continuity, trust, and security (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). Given the positive influence parental involvement has on children, beginning early childhood teachers learn how to effectively communicate with and involve parents in their children's education. There is no dearth of literature on this topic, which has been researched for

many decades now and continues to be updated (Keyser, 2004; Koralek, 2007). However, according to Miretzky (2004), most of the literature on parent involvement encourages interactions that continue an unequal relationship. She asserts that newsletters, workshops for parents to help children with homework more effectively, and encouraging teachers to contact parents more frequently does create more of an interaction between the school and the home, but also continue to keep parents in the role of visitors. Jeynes (2011) states that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are more subtle, rather than a simple focus on writing newsletters as mentioned by Miretzky. These include parents maintaining high expectations of their children, communicating with children about school, and parental style (Jeynes, 2011). Experts view parent involvement differently. However, there is general agreement about the benefits of this collaboration for all concerned. Thus, it is important to consider new teachers' views on building relationships with families.

The early years of teaching are critical in influencing both the quality of teaching and the teacher's retention in the profession (OECD, 2005). Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2004) contend that one significant factor for teacher retention is improving teachers' relationships with parents and the broader community. These authors assert that strategies to accomplish this have been a focus of education reform for decades, but progress is difficult, and the challenge of increasing parental involvement remains, especially in urban districts. Over the years, other studies have confirmed this. A 1991 survey of first-year teachers in the U.S. found that 70% of teachers thought that parents viewed schools and teachers as adversaries (Metropolitan Life, 1991). Almost a decade and a half later, "new teachers consider engaging and working with parents as their greatest challenge and the area they were least prepared to manage during their first year" (Metropolitan Life, 2005, p. 5). Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2002) suggest teachers with limited experiences or skills may reach out to solicit participation only to give up prematurely if efforts are not immediately successful. Hence, it can be concluded that parental involvement remains problematic, especially for teachers in the first year of teaching. The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) reports that there are 691,000 preschool and kindergarten teachers in the U.S. alone; this implies that very large numbers of people globally are involved in this relationship. Thus, it is imperative to examine the challenges faced by new teachers in establishing and maintaining parent–teacher collaboration. This is important for retaining new teachers in the profession. In turn, this will ensure the quality of teaching and learning experiences, as recent research has shown that early childhood centers with high rates of teacher turnover have lower levels of global quality (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011).

The aim of this study was to document the views of preschool and kindergarten teachers in their first year of teaching about working with the parents of their students, focusing on areas of concerns. It is recognized that beginning teachers also have positive experiences with parents. However, this paper is delimited to difficult aspects of the new teachers' work with parents and families. Exploring new teachers' views pertaining to this part of their work provides the early childhood teacher education field with opportunities to reconsider some portion of courses offered as well as practicing teachers' professional development needs. This study was carried out in New Zealand.

A study conducted by an international ECE Task Force (Education International, 2010) describes early childhood education in the U.S. consisting of part-day and full-day programs. Similarly, half-day and full-day programs are offered in New Zealand. Early childhood education provision in both countries includes purchase-of-services (private sector) and public or community (not-for-profit sector) systems. Other similarities are that higher numbers of early childhood teachers in both countries are employed by the private sector (Education Counts, 2013; Education International, 2010), the differences in pay scales of teachers working in public and private programs, and the professional status of teachers working with young children. In New Zealand, remuneration for early childhood teachers varies greatly (TeachNZ, n.d.) according to the type of service—community (not-for-profit) or private. Although the New Zealand Ministry of Education funds early childhood services to pay the same salaries to qualified early childhood teachers as those paid to primary and secondary teachers, yet, "there is no effective mechanism to ensure that early childhood teachers across the sector are paid at the same rates" (Education International, 2010, p. 64). Teachers who work in community (not-for-profit) kindergartens have pay parity with primary and secondary teachers and are better paid. This is similar in the U.S., as, "typically, teachers working in public school programs receive a much higher salary than those teachers working in private settings" (Education International, 2010, p. 87). Kane (2008) reports that in New Zealand, people working in early education such as teachers, head teachers, management committee members, and student teachers are all convinced that their role and work is fundamentally misunderstood by the wider society. The low status of early childhood teachers in New Zealand is also reflected in the U.S.: "The status of teachers involved in early childhood education in the U.S. is markedly lower compared to the status of teachers in primary and secondary levels" (Education International, 2010, p. 87). The congruence of many key indicators in the field in the two countries as outlined above provides a basis to suggest that this study could be relevant to the experiences of first-year early childhood education teachers in many places.

The participants completed a three-year early childhood education teaching program from a New Zealand college of education. They all graduated in the same year and had completed the same courses in their teacher education program. These new teachers fulfilled the requirements of two family-related courses. In the first year of training, they studied family from a sociological perspective. In the second year, they studied about working with parents as partners. Of the 14 participants, seven worked in public not-for-profit centers, and the other half worked in private early childhood education settings. There was no attempt to recruit participants based on their demographic characteristics. The criterion was that they were in their first year of teaching with the same educational background. All 14 participants were women between the ages of 21 years to their early 30s. Europeans are 67.6% of New Zealand's population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). This was reflected in the participant pool, as 10 participants identified themselves as European, 2 as indigenous Maori, and 1 as Samoan.

Conceptual Framework: Social Exchange Theory

The aim of this study was to document first-year teachers' views of the difficulties of their relationships with students' parents. Relationships are mutual; however, the general perception is that teachers and schools are responsible for the deficits in parent–teacher collaboration. For example, Tett (2001) refers to it as the control that professionals have imposed on schooling, while Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) conclude that the problems in the parent–teacher relationship arise from the constant "othering" of parental knowledge by teachers (p. 242). Similarly, Kalyanpur, Harry, and Skrtic (2000) contend that barriers to parent–teacher collaboration are a result of broader systemic problems within the education system itself, such as the hierarchical structure in which teachers are assumed to have knowledge of best practices for children, while parental knowledge and beliefs are devalued. Thus, much has been written about the power schools and teachers hold over parents. This study employs social exchange theory as its conceptual framework to examine the parent–teacher relationship.

Social exchange theory is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations. Within social exchange theory, these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person. Social exchange theory's success proposition delineates that "for all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action under similar stimulus conditions" (Homans, 1974, p.

16). According to Chibucos, Leite, and Weis (2005), social exchange theory assumes that because of the competitive nature of social systems, exchange processes lead to differentiation of power and privilege in social groups. Hence, this study is well situated in the social exchange theory as it meets the above-mentioned key assumptions of this theory. It documents the views of new teachers as they work with parents, thus these interactions are symbiotic and reliant on the actions of the other person. Further, it posits that if particular actions of teachers or parents are reciprocated, then such actions are more likely to be repeated. The study focuses on aspects of teachers' work that they found troublesome. Therefore, this theory provides a lens to view differentiation of power and privilege between new teachers and parents with whom they found it difficult to work.

Social exchange theory studies the mutual gratifications persons provide one another that sustain social relations. As per this theory, social relationships develop depending on the exchange of resources between parties and the weighing of costs and benefits. In early childhood education programs, social exchange theory can be applied to parent–teacher relationships. According to Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, and Moodie (2009), the perceived benefits of parent involvement in an early childhood education program can be tangible (e.g., parent education courses) or intangible (e.g., a warm and welcoming environment). For example, if a parent was asked to volunteer in the early childhood education program, the social exchange theory predicts that the family member would begin to weigh the cost of volunteering in the program against the benefits the family receives from the program. If the parent feels that the benefit, whether tangible or intangible, she receives from the program outweighs the costs of volunteering, she may decide to volunteer in the program. However, if the cost of volunteering outweighs the benefits, then she may decide not to volunteer.

Social exchange requires others to reciprocate, and mutual reinforcements influence the parties in the relationship. Thus, behavior that generates positive consequences is likely to be repeated, whereas if reinforcement fails or if reciprocity is not observed, then relations tend to terminate. Further, according to Blau (1964), the failure to reciprocate validates claims to superiority, and the unwillingness to enter into "an egalitarian exchange relation is likely to produce hostility" (p. 113). An example of this could be the notion of the teacher as the professional fountain of knowledge, thus dispossessing the parents of their roles as the primary stakeholder in the education of their children; parents are likely to resent such a relationship. Trust is a core principle of social exchange theory; therefore, a failure to reciprocate "engenders loss of trust" (Blau, 1964, p. 108). Hence, if a mutual trust evolves between the parent and the teacher,

the extent and commitment to the partnership will increase. On the contrary, if trust between these parties is not developed or is lost, then the commitment to this relationship will begin to diminish, as will feelings of engagement.

In reciprocal exchanges, a comparable inequality is produced when actors reciprocate each other's giving at different rates. If disadvantaged actors must give more frequently to maintain their powerful partner's intermittent reciprocity, they pay more for the benefits they receive and their advantaged partner pays less (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2006). Earlier, Blau (1964) cautioned that established power enables an individual to compel others to provide services without offering a fair return. This unequal exchange can happen in parent–teacher relationships. For example, a kindergarten teacher might be reaching out to parents for something she believes is important. However, if the parent ignores this, then this implies that the parent is the powerful actor in this network. This reflects Blau's warning that unequal power leads to unequal benefits in relationships.

Molm (2003) emphasized the early stage of relationship development. Therefore, relationship development is analogous to climbing a ladder. The goal achieved at step one, successfully grasping the next rung, provides the foundation for an even higher climb. This makes it imperative to help beginning teachers succeed in their relationship building with parents and provides a rationale for documenting teachers' concerns early on in their careers. Linking parent–teacher relationships and social exchange theory is a relatively unexplored area of research and is not represented to any great extent in the existing literature on this topic. Hence, it is envisaged that social exchange theory may shed light on how these relationships influence and affect new teachers to exercise power in their daily lives.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative framework, as this researcher was "genuinely interested in the subject, both in terms of the overall phenomenon and the people who can shed light on it" (Toma, 2000, p. 180). Qualitative research focuses on situational, contextual issues embedded in the actions and meanings of the participants, thus it was suited to documenting the concerns of new teacher–parent relationships. This study could be indicative of the experiences of new early childhood education teachers in other contexts, as it may provide a vicarious link with the reader's experience and thus can be a basis for generalization. According to Stake (1978), to generalize in this way is to be both intuitive and empirical. These naturalistic generalizations are arrived at by recognizing the similarities of issues in and out of context and by "sensing the natural covariations of happening" (Stake, 1978, p. 6). Hence, readers are

invited to compare connections to their contexts. A researcher using qualitative methods can gain an insider's view of the field of study. However, the close involvement of the researcher can often raise methodological or moral issues. This researcher did not know the participants and had never met them prior to the study. There was no conflict of interest, as the researcher was not their teacher, employer, or in any other position of influence. Despite this, the power differential between the researcher and the participants is accepted. Further, it is acknowledged that a female researcher can often elicit material from other women with ease (Finch, 1984), and this can raise ethical issues. Recognizing this, procedures are clearly stated, aiming for an incisive, scholarly work that can also be useful for application in the field.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first contact with the participants was made through a college of education faculty member, who invited recent graduates to this study. Those people who agreed to participate also provided their telephone numbers. This investigator's initial contact with participants was via telephone. During this call, the purpose of the study and the nature of the participant's involvement in the research were explained, and confidentiality and anonymity of the participant's contribution were assured. Participant information sheets, interview questions, consent forms, and ethics approvals were sent out. The next telephone contact set up a time and place for an interview that was convenient for them. Individual participants were interviewed personally; each interview lasted for approximately one and a half hours. It was important to get an understanding of the new teachers' perspectives on working with parents in their own words, thus interviews were considered a useful strategy. It was envisaged that this method would allow a broad range of issues to emerge. Prior to the interview commencing, written informed consent was obtained from each participant. These interviews were conducted in the sixth or seventh month of their first year of working after graduating from the early childhood teacher education program. The primary research question was: What are the new teachers' concerns in working with parents? The interviews were guided by the questions below, which emanated from the broader aim of this study.

1. Why did you choose early childhood teaching?
2. What do you see as your role in working with parents?
3. What are the difficulties of your day-to-day communication with parents?
4. What are some challenges that you did not anticipate?
5. What were some concerns of working in this particular context? (socioeconomic area, cultural differences, any others).

The purpose of these interviews was to gather thick descriptions of the challenges experienced by beginning early childhood teachers in their work with parents. Hence, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidated and illuminated the particular topic (Patton, 2003). The first question was useful in opening the conversation and establishing reasons for participants' career choice. The subsequent questions reflected the overarching research question. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed; names and identifying features of their early childhood settings were removed from the transcript and pseudonyms applied for teachers and anyone mentioned (including students).

As qualitative research is iterative, data collection and analyses were concurrent. For example, as the first interview was transcribed, it revealed some points about preservice courses that were probed in future interviews. The interview transcription was verbatim; as these transcripts were read, parts of the text were identified and marked, and then these were reviewed. The process of open coding allowed the researcher to mark sections of the transcripts by naming or using the participants' words that related to a specific subject. Hence, at this stage, coding the data was at the concrete level of analysis. Through comparison, the codes were summarized to the first level of "abstraction" (Punch, 1998, p. 208); these are identified as categories. The next phase of analysis was at a further conceptual level; this aided in the creation of specific constructs. The aim here was to identify the "underlying essence of the phenomena being studied" (Daly, 2007, p. 220). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) refer to these as "theoretical constructs" (p. 67). Social exchange theory, which is the theoretical framework of this study, is evident in these constructs. In summary:

- The codes were identified through interview transcripts; these were at the concrete level, as they were the actual words or phrases from the transcripts.
- The categories were the first level of abstraction, and they were reached through comparison of codes.
- Categories were organized at a higher conceptual level to identify constructs.

Figure 1 delineates the data analysis process. The construct, "Lack of Reciprocity" is taken as an example. As the findings indicate, this construct consisted of three categories: communication difficulties, uncertainty of pedagogic expectation, and parental hostility. Figure 1 uses two of these categories as an example. Instead of examples for the third category, this part of the figure is used to explain how the concrete data from the interviews led to the constructs to identify the underlying essence of the topic of this study.
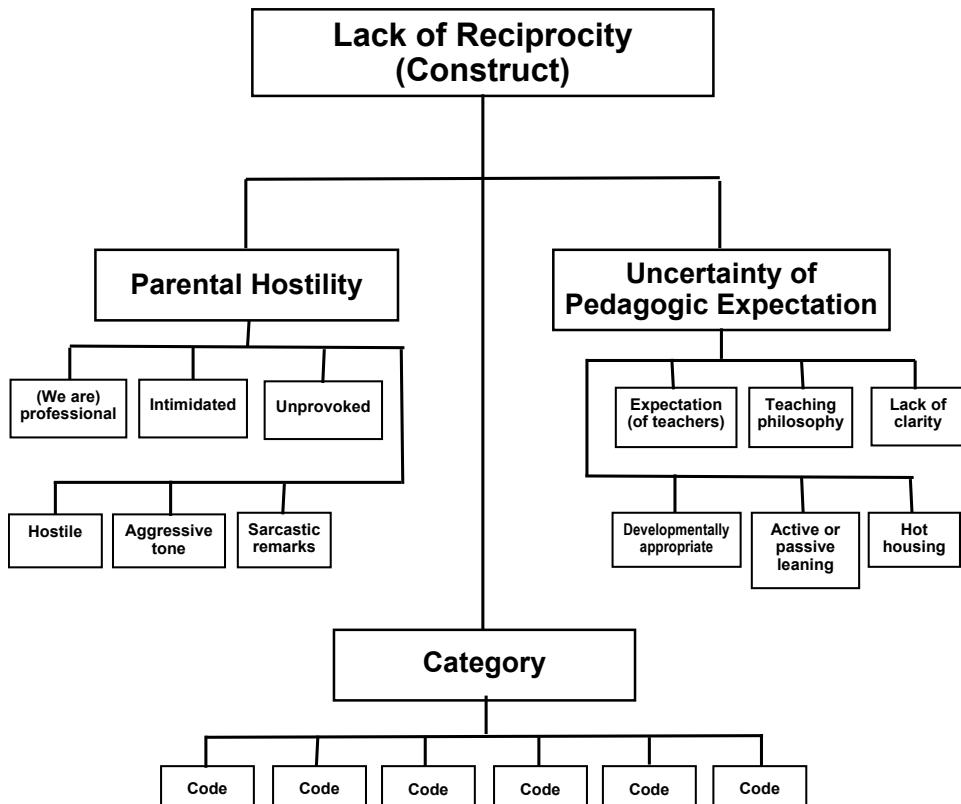
Figure1. Codes to Constructs

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative studies do not neatly fit into the traditional concepts of reliability and validity. For example, a study of inter-rater reliability in qualitative research by Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, and Martaeu (1997) concluded a hallmark of qualitative research is that it is inherently subjective. Thus, analysis is a form of interpretation, and interpretation involves a dialogue between researcher and data in which the researcher's own views have important effects (Morse, 1994). Hence, this study has employed approaches that are suited to qualitative research. To safeguard rigor, verification strategies such as ensuring methodological coherence and sampling sufficiency; developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection, and analysis; and thinking theoretically were employed, as recommended by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002). Methodological coherence was ensured through congruence between the research question and the methods employed. A qualitative investigation provided the best means for exploring the first-year teachers' concerns regarding their work with parents. The sample was appropriate; it consisted of

participants who were first-year early childhood teachers, as they have the best knowledge of the research topic. This first-hand information ensured effective saturation of categories with optimal quality data. Data collection and analysis were a parallel process; this mutual interaction confirmed what was known and what the researcher needed to know. For example, it was already known through earlier studies that parents in lower socioeconomic areas are somewhat less involved in their children's schools. However, the interviews revealed information related to parents in higher socioeconomic areas; this was further explored and examined through the process of iterative data collection and analysis. The theoretical framework of social exchange theory was utilized to interpret and analyze the data; this led to a deeper conceptual understanding of the challenges faced by new teachers. "Together, all of these verification strategies incrementally and interactively contribute to and build reliability and validity, thus ensuring rigor" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 19).

Findings

Five constructs were identified from the data; four of these reflected the social exchange theory, which was the theoretical framework in this study. The first construct is titled Lack of Reciprocity because it describes new teachers' experiences in which their efforts in trying to reach the parents were not mutual. This includes the following three categories: Lack of Communication, Uncertainty of Pedagogic Expectations, and Parental Hostility. The second construct, Difficulties of Building Relationships, depicts how differing contexts of parents make it a struggle to form connections. The three categories for this construct are Higher Socioeconomic Level, Lower Socioeconomic Level, and Cultural Differences. The third construct, entitled Power-Dependence, explains how the absence of expected exchanges can generate the problem of inequality in relations. This covers the category of Parent Volunteering. The fourth construct, Social Identity of Early Childhood Teachers, clarifies the new teachers' opinions regarding the status of their profession and its links to how parents respond to them. The category for this is titled Status of the Profession. The final construct did not indicate links to the social exchange theory, rather it reflected the interview question, "What are some challenges that you did not anticipate?" Thus, it was titled Unanticipated Challenges. The category for this is Preservice, as the participants referred to their present challenges in relation to their college courses. Statistical generalization of the findings presented in the next section is not intended, but the findings can be applied by "naturalistic generalization" (Stark & Torrance, 2005, p. 34), thus readers may recognize aspects of their own experience and intuitively generalize.

The participants chose early childhood teaching as a career because they wanted to "make a difference for children," "work in a helping profession," "give something back to my community," and they "enjoyed working with children." In responding to the question, "What do you see as your role in working with parents?" all 14 participants were positive, as the following examples indicate:

> I would like to support parents in their role; I know they are the primary people in the child's life.

> As a teacher, my role is to follow the parents' aspirations and views. I have to work to build closer connections between the home and the center [early childhood education program].

> Effective working relationships and involving parents with their child are important for me.

> My role right now, I would say, [is to] develop two-way communication about children's learning.

The new teachers described their role was to "work" with parents, "in partnership with parents;" they used terms such as sharing, participating, communicating, collaborating, respecting, and belonging to describe their role. Eight new teachers also emphasized that they want parents to view them as "approachable" and "friendly." It is noted from the outset that the focus of this study was documenting the concerns of beginning early childhood teachers; this in no way negates the positive relationships that they were forming with parents. However, each of the 14 participants had experienced some parents with whom they found it difficult to work. In early childhood education programs, the teachers have a triadic relationship with the child and the parents. Therefore, the value of this relationship to the career of a first-year teacher cannot be overemphasized.

Construct 1: Lack of Reciprocity

Communication Difficulties

In this study, first-year teachers felt that, as they were settling into their new positions, communication with parents could be difficult. Nearly all (13) participants mentioned this area of difficulty. There was variety in the types of communication issues, from parents who found it difficult to communicate in English to parents who simply chose to ignore the teacher's request. Parents who do not follow the school's policies can make this a further challenge:

> Some parents don't seem to understand that when their child is sick they cannot bring them to the preschool; it is in the policy, and the parents

signed it when they enrolled their child. We even send newsletters—doesn't make a difference to some; it is just those few [parents].

Participants used many strategies to involve parents, such as approaching parents personally and notice boards with center happenings. However, they reported that despite these efforts involving some parents was difficult. One respondent explained how she was trying to overcome the problem of lack of communication with the parents, but it seemed that her efforts did not make much difference:

> We used to put the children's art on the shelf for the parents to collect, but it would sit there and sit there, and parents wouldn't pick it up. But now I have this special sign to go and check. Today a father flew in, dropped off, and flew out. He was so fast, and his child has these six paintings, and they haven't been picked up in three weeks. It's a shame.

The teacher wanted the parents to pick up the child's art work, as she believed that it would be a wonderful opportunity for conversations between the child and parents about what the child was doing at preschool. She reported on a positive experience of a parent who regularly picked up her daughter's paintings. The teacher explained that in kindergarten, they were talking about things to sit on, such as chairs and benches and so on. The children were drawing and painting these. The little girl came in one morning and sang the nursery rhyme, "Pussy cat, pussy cat....under her chair." The new teacher reported feeling "chuffed" [very pleased], as it showed her that the mother was extending the child's learning at home. In addition, several participants declared that they considered themselves good communicators; these experiences of communication difficulties were new to them. All 14 participants mentioned that college had taught them to reflect on their teaching, and thus they kept trying different ways of reaching parents.

Uncertainty of Pedagogic Expectations

Eight participants reported unclear or differing expectations about teaching and learning. When parents do not share their expectations clearly, beginning early childhood teachers feel less valued. This participant was at a loss, trying to understand what the parents actually wanted from her for their child:

> Only some parents sort of have an attitude that perhaps we are not doing our job properly, that we should be doing more. What can we be doing? What do you want from this center for your child? They say oh no, no, no, it's fine…only with a few of them, and that can be difficult. I find that quite frustrating, that they just won't come straight out to you and say, I wish you'd do such and such, because my child will really benefit

from it. You know, that sort of talking behind your back sort of thing. I find it hard to deal with, and I have to keep my mouth shut, because I am the sort of person that would like to go up to them and say, you know, what's the story. Whereas, I know I really can't do that.

Furthermore, these teachers indicated that if they had clarity about what the parents expected, they could provide more meaningful learning for children.

Another challenge that was reported by six participants was the mismatch between their teaching philosophy and parental expectations. "Jenny's parents keep asking me to give her written homework." Another participant reported a parent's request: "I want Ben to get into Kings [elite school]; make him do some real work." The teachers followed developmentally appropriate, constructivist approaches to learning and teaching, while some parents wanted more structured learning for their children with a strong emphasis on academics. Thus, the program that the teachers presented was not valued, and this made them feel that they were not succeeding as teachers.

Parental Hostility

Handling angry parents can be stressful for any teacher, especially a first-year teacher. The participants were aware of their role as professionals; they wanted to have positive relationships with parents, colleagues, and students. The interview transcripts show that all participants often mentioned respect and being polite and pleasant. Some specific strategies reported by the participants were: listen actively, phrase positively, don't get emotional, and give constructive feedback. Six participants also reported that they had come across irate, confrontational, rude parents, whose reactions were unprovoked. As one participant reported the following incident, she mentioned that she felt intimidated but also embarrassed, as this happened in open view of other staff and parents: "Yesterday, a father was aggressive and sarcastic with me. He wanted me to 'tell' his daughter to put on her shoes outside."

Some parents can feel offended and become unreceptive when teachers have to tell them about a problem their child is having. A child at preschool was pushing other children, sometimes quite forcefully. After talking with her head teacher, the participant asked the parent to come to a meeting. The parent insisted that the child "never does that at home, and you [teacher] do not know how to deal with these situations." The teacher had prepared a behavior management plan so that she could work in conjunction with the parent. However, the irate parent did not give her the opportunity to talk about this plan.

Parental aggression towards teachers is a cause of concern, and disarming volatile parents was a challenge, but teachers were also unsure of the reasons for this hostility: "What caused her [a mother] to lash out at me?" The altruistic nature

of the participants came through in the interviews as they worried about the well-being of children whose parents demonstrated confrontational behaviors.

Construct 2: Difficulties of Building Relationships

Higher Socioeconomic Level

Teachers reported that their college courses had covered contemporary societal issues related to working with families, such as poverty, family arrangements, racism, language, and cultural differences. They also mentioned that the lectures, class discussions, and professional literature all seemed to say that teachers working in high socioeconomic areas would have no difficulties in working with parents. They explained that working in high socioeconomic areas was always discussed as a secondary topic, lightly touched upon to contrast working with "difficult or different" families. One specific advantage of teachers working in high socioeconomic areas that the participants reported learning about through their teacher education courses was parental involvement, because "middle-class parents see teachers as equals." The six new teachers who worked in these areas were not prepared for the challenges they faced: "It's middle-aged, higher class people—the parents. They zoom in, drop their child off, and zoom out. It's really hard when they zoom in and out so quickly. I don't even know the parents' names; it's terrible."

Other concerns mentioned by teachers who worked in higher income areas related to children being dropped off and picked up by nannies. The participants rarely saw or talked to the parents. Some parents employed au pairs; these young individuals come to New Zealand via Working Holiday Scheme Work Visas. There are regulations that au pairs from certain countries must not work for the same employer for more than three months, which means that the family employs them for short durations: "Robert [student] has had two au pairs since I started here. Sometimes their English is not so good, so I find it hard, and they are not Robert's mum, so I don't say much."

The participants raised the issue of discontinuity in the child's life. For example, they mentioned that behavior management could be inconsistent if there are too many caregivers for the child or if the caregivers changed often. The participants also noted that many parents remained in high-pressure jobs to provide the best for their children. The new teachers could see the parents' perspectives, even though the lower parent–teacher contact was problematic.

Lower Socioeconomic Level

Eight teachers who worked in low socioeconomic areas discussed their familiarity with the theories of parent involvement; they reported that they were

"sold on the importance of involving families." They wanted to "support marginalized families," and they were trying to implement the strategies that they had learned through their college courses. However, it seems that some aspects were still challenging, despite their efforts to develop relationships.

> In this area [name of the low socioeconomic area], getting through to parents is basically very difficult, because they come in, drop their children off. So I don't get to talk to a lot of parents in the morning. Can't see them in the evening, they want to go home. So it has been difficult to get to know them, and if there are any problems, it is sort of hard to try to tell them to hold on—we've got to talk.

The participants who worked in these areas were consistent in their understanding of challenges faced by low-income families. They reported scheduling meetings to meet the shift work patterns of some of the parents. They also showed awareness that many traditional means of parent involvement such as bake sales or book fairs require a financial contribution, which might be difficult for these families. Knowing these constraints, they endeavored to create a sense of goodwill between the parents and themselves, yet despite this, the response was lacking from some parents.

As in the higher income area, in lower income areas, many children were brought to the early childhood center by others, but mostly grandparents. This also made communication difficult.

> Jenny's parents run the Chinese bakery in [name of area]. They start work very early in the morning and finish very late. Her grandmother brings her to the center; she is very sweet but does not speak English, so you can see my challenge.

The participants reported that they had limited knowledge of intergenerational contacts, such as approaching and working with grandparents from culturally diverse families. Engaging grandparents who spoke limited English in a two-way communication about their grandchildren was a challenge. The participants wanted to share information about the child's day in the kindergarten and wanted to encourage the family members to share information about the child's experiences in the home, but this was difficult. The participants were particularly frustrated that they could not communicate positive news about the child's achievements; they felt ineffective in their role.

Cultural Differences

Nine teachers working across socioeconomic areas reported incidents of cultural variations in childrearing. Thus, these concerns were not confined to a particular socioeconomic area. The teachers were unfamiliar with these cultural

differences and found them to be very disconcerting as a first-year teacher. One parent asked the teacher to keep her son's layers of clothing on during a warm day; the new teacher felt that the child would be uncomfortable. Another parent asked the teacher not to let her daughter play with water. The beginning teacher felt conflicted, because water play was a part of the center's program; moreover, the child enjoyed water play. The new teacher had observed this child trying to make friends and attempting to use English at the water trough. She explained this to the mother, who responded no because she gets "colds." In the interview, the new teacher reported that she was familiar with the benefits of water play through her college courses, but did not remember discussing any problems such as the one she faced. This first-year teacher also faced an ethical dilemma; she explains:

> A parent wants to do a spiritual purification ceremony; the other teacher feels that since it will not involve anyone at session time it will be OK. I feel it is inappropriate; we have parents and staff of many different religions who would probably not wish this. I feel that if one religious group is permitted to do such a ceremony, then other groups must have the same rights and opportunities.

The interview transcripts showed that the teachers demonstrated a genuine interest and respect for culturally diverse families. However, they still grappled with this part of their work and questioned if it was possible to meet the needs of all these different families. Early childhood teachers' difficulties in this area were not limited to parents from cultures that they were unfamiliar with but happened with parents from the majority culture as well.

> I was singing the greeting song at the morning mat time, you know, with greetings from different countries. A parent came and told me, "I don't want my son learning coconut languages."

Coconut is a derogatory term for people of the Pacific Islands, many of whom have settled in New Zealand. This young teacher was distressed; she found it unbelievable that people could think like this. The teachers were prepared to work with young children to help educate them about stereotypes, prejudice, and racism. However, responding to parents who had the presumption of privilege or domination were not in their repertoire of teaching strategies. These parents refused to acknowledge the diversity that exists in schools today. The reluctance of such parents impaired the teachers' abilities to be inclusive and to help eliminate stereotypes at an early age.

Construct 3: Power-Dependence

Parent Volunteering

Five participants who worked in not-for-profit centers reported that parents were expected to volunteer to assist with the maintenance of the center and administrative tasks. However, they described a lack of support:

> The parents here are actually quite a challenge. They have had a [teaching] team in the past, which has done everything, so the parents think the teachers should do everything. The last team actually burnt out.

> At this particular center, parents think that the maintenance of the center is the teachers' responsibility.

> We get no parent support, just look at the playground and the garden; it's pretty shocking really. We can't get parents to come in and help us with these things. It is a lot of pressure on us teachers, because we are taking a lot of workload that parents could. You are not just a teacher here, but a painter, carpenter, counselor; we do all our own books— money and all that. It's more than just teaching.

Even when there is a clear expectation that parents will volunteer in their child's school, some do not. This absence of parental involvement leaves teachers depleted of physical energy and emotionally exhausted. This lack of reciprocity also demonstrates an imbalance between investments made by teachers and the outcomes. Hence, teachers' contribution to the relationship was more than they got in return.

Construct 4: Social Identity of Early Childhood Teachers

Status of the Profession

A majority (12) of the beginning early childhood teachers reported that their role and work was not understood. They believed that the public perception of early childhood teachers is that they are glorified babysitters—their job is to play with children and paint, and anybody can do this. This view is reflected by some teachers who felt undervalued by parents:

> This work [early childhood teaching] is not easy peasy, but it is exactly what some parents think: we are baby sitters; 14-year-olds can do it, so I guess they treat us like that.

A participant narrated her experience of a child's mother who was a lawyer; because of her schedule, the nanny picked up the child at the end of the day. Once the mother came to pick her daughter, instead of the nanny. The new teacher told the mother in an appreciative manner that it was good to see her pick up her child at this time, as the child seemed happy to see her mother.

Maria's mother told me I was lucky that I could sing and play the whole day; her job was so [oooooo] intense.

These teachers had spent three years and many thousands of dollars in a university level study and considered themselves to be professionals. However, as early childhood programs also employ teachers who are not qualified, it becomes difficult for parents and the public to differentiate between qualified professionals and those who are not. Beginning early childhood teachers feel frustrated when the complexity of their role is not understood, their work is seen as less than teaching, and their jobs are held in low esteem by parents.

Construct 5: Unanticipated Challenges

Preservice

During the interview, all of the participants referred to their preservice education. They wished that they had more understanding of working with challenging parents. They mentioned learning about producing newsletters, designing notice boards for parents, finding community services for parents, and practicing mock parent–teacher conferences. All these strategies would be useful; nonetheless, new teachers reported:

> While I have been at the center, there have been some incredible things that I've had to deal with, especially with adults, you know their questioning you. You've got to work with the parents, and college has to realize some things—like that it's not just saying hello to the parents or greeting the parents, there is more to it.

> I didn't feel college prepared me at all in dealing with the everyday, how to communicate with parents who are not "ideal parents," so I really had to work on that.

New teachers also recognized that the college could not prepare them for everything. A participant reported that a mother brought her son to the afternoon session at the kindergarten with the letters ---- in blue on his forehead and wearing a blue bandana. She and the other teacher were not aware of the significance of this, but the head teacher gently took the child aside, wiped the letters from his forehead, and removed his bandana. Later, she explained to her colleagues that this represented a name of a "gang" and its colors. The new teacher explained that the head teacher approached the mother about this, who responded that her child looked "cute" and "fierce." The new teacher reported that the head teacher had worked in this area for 15 years, and this was the first time something of this nature had happened. She reflected on this: "College can't give us a magic pill for all our problems."

Discussion

All the new early childhood teachers in this study were aware of the need to have positive relationships with their students' parents. They emphasized the importance of working with parents and being able to relate to the families. Participants wanted parents to see them as approachable and friendly and to trust and respect them. Despite this affirmative understanding of their role, they reported challenges in working with parents.

Relationships

Communication and building relationships with parents were difficult for new teachers. They reported three interrelated problems. The first was how to get parents involved, for example, parents who "zoom in and out" and fail to communicate with their child's teacher. From the teachers' perspective, contact at drop off and pickup would be useful. Recent research from Italy reinforces this. In the Italian study, both parents and educators reported that the most frequent type of contact was informal conversation at the beginning or at the end of the child's school day; the frequency of home–school contacts is associated with the quality of the relationship between parents and educators. The more frequent the contacts, the more collaboration and positive relationships can be fostered (Pirchio, Volpe, & Taeschner, 2011, p. 66). Another example was the parent not bothering to pick up his child's painting for three weeks. The teachers were aware of the importance of this type of involvement. The new teachers' understanding is supported by a study which characterized involved parents as those who were providing a rich learning environment at home with activities, including talking with their child about the importance of school and helping them practice what they are learning at school. Children of these involved parents evidenced higher levels of social skills, greater achievement in reading and mathematics, and demonstrated greater academic motivation (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

Second, this lack of communication on the parents' part left new teachers in a predicament about the nature of pedagogic expectations, such as "What do parents want from kindergarten for their child?" They expressed disappointment when their efforts to involve parents were thwarted by a lack of parental response and apathy in some cases. Time pressures on parents may be partly responsible for a lack of engagement, and cultural or linguistic differences can impede information flow. However, it is a reality that some parents are not interested in discussing their children's learning. Preservice teacher education can provide an authentic picture of problems that new teachers are likely to encounter. The parent–teacher relationship can be successful if both parties are

making the effort; in this study, the teachers reported that they made many efforts, but some parents were still not receptive. This type of mismatch should be overtly examined during preservice training.

Third, parental hostility and denial of a teacher's competence were also issues, for example, when the father angrily told the teacher to ask his child to put shoes on outside. It may be more likely for new teachers to experience parental aggression as they have yet to develop effective strategies to avert parental conflict. Learning to avoid, prevent, reduce, and resolve conflicts with parents is as important as learning about writing a newsletter for parents. Preservice education can better prepare teachers to deal with confrontational parents. Further professional development based in the settings where the teachers are working is another way of dealing with these concerns effectively. One specific suggestion is to use Smyth's (1991) framework for reflection on action. Through this approach, teachers would be encouraged to pose a series of four questions, respectively moving from description to meaning to confrontation to reconstruction. This could be a powerful tool for prompting higher-order reflection on issues and concerns identified by these teachers.

Socioeconomic Status

Earlier literature on teacher–parent relationships in the early years (Benson & Martin, 2003; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000) contends that a major factor determining parents' involvement is their employment. Particularly, poor, working-class parents tend to work longer hours and have less control over when they work than richer, middle-class parents. Thus, these studies have concluded that the lower the income level of parents, the less they will be involved. The findings of the present study refute the above conclusions. New teachers in upper-middle-class areas reported that many parents were focused on their careers. Therefore, nannies, au pairs, or grandparents were their first point of contact, which added to the difficulty of trying to communicate directly with the parents. Thus, lack of parental involvement was an issue for new teachers in differing socioeconomic areas. Some high-income professionals can have inflexible work schedules, or they want to or feel they must demonstrate a single-minded commitment to their jobs, which makes it necessary to rely on other caregivers. Parents in lower socioeconomic areas might have time constraints due to work schedules or having other children in their care; these can be barriers to parent involvement. Another factor for parents in lower economic areas is that because of their own educational backgrounds, they might not be confident in communicating with teachers. Besides these genuine reasons, some parents may just lack interest in their child's learning; Flynn (2007) states that, unfortunately, some parents try to divorce themselves from their parental

responsibilities. Such parents will tell a teacher, "he is your problem from 9 to 3" (p. 24). It is important for new teachers to be aware of and be prepared to deal with this range of difficulties; simply focusing on noninvolvement of low-income parents is limiting teachers' readiness to work with all parents. When dealing with issues related to the socioeconomic aspects of their work, both preservice teacher education and continuing professional development could encourage teachers to question their underlying assumptions, biases, and values that bear on their teaching. Teachers should be urged to ask questions about constraints and possibilities of working with families from different socioeconomic groups.

Parent Involvement

The findings indicate that new early childhood teachers' sense of efficacy is impacted when parental support is insufficient. Participants who worked in not-for-profit settings such as public kindergartens, where there is an expectation of parents volunteering their time and expertise in the early childhood setting, specifically mentioned this. This expectation is clearly communicated to parents before they enroll the child in this type of setting: "taking part in working bees on the maintenance of the building and grounds is a part of the parent's role" (Nelson Tasman Kindergarten, 2012, para. 2). A working bee is a New Zealand term for a voluntary group doing a job to assist an organization such as a school. Maintenance of building and grounds is a physically demanding and time-consuming job. Interviewed teachers found that this support was missing; besides their normal working hours, they had to come in on weekends to complete this maintenance work. During their first year of teaching, they felt unprepared to engage families in this aspect of their children's education. Thus, this lack of volunteering placed pressure on teachers with an already high workload. Parents' volunteering in schools is recognized as an important aspect of establishing partnerships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Therefore, it is argued that for a true partnership to develop between the parent and teacher, new teachers should be prepared for the reality of practice as, in this situation, parents were not receptive to volunteering in early childhood services. These experiences should also be part of the discussion that happens in teacher education courses. A suggestion for in-service professional development is for teachers to be action researchers on specific difficulties such as lack of involvement from some parents. The recommendation here is not for a scholarly action research project; rather, teachers can be encouraged to articulate, document, and dialogue with professional development mentors or their more experienced peers about what they are observing, what would they like to see, how things might be different, and what possibilities are there for the future.

Cross-Cultural Competency

Preservice courses in cultural competency require student teachers to be aware of their own biases and to be inclusive of other cultures. To welcome families from minority cultures in their settings, the new teachers put greetings in various languages on the classroom walls. They introduced art and music from different nations; they celebrated various "country days," when students from a particular country were encouraged to wear their traditional clothing and parents were invited to share foods and stories from their culture. They were doing all they had learned at college; despite this, new teachers faced challenges from two angles. The first type of difficulty arose with families whose cultural backgrounds were different from their own. Beginning teachers reported lack of familiarity with many cultural aspects; they wanted to be inclusive, but in the words of one participant, "did not know enough," such as differences in child-rearing practices. They found it difficult when parental requests were outside of their norm, such as parents wanting their child to be dressed in many layers of clothing, or children who were not allowed to participate in what they considered as typical activities in an early childhood classroom such as water play. It is contended that new teachers had yet to come to an understanding that other ways of child development are equally valid. They were steeped in what they had learned in college as being appropriate, child-centered practices and had very little practical experience to temper this idealism in practice. With further experience in the field, they are likely to understand that there are many views of optimal child development. Teacher education courses can help students understand that there is no simple solution for cultural differences. The visible aspects of culture—food, costumes, music, and so on—are just a piece of the whole picture. The same parent who wholeheartedly supports the teacher in celebrating a "country day" by bringing in their cultural cuisine to share with the students can also be the one whose norms and values are not understood by the teacher. Further, the process of cultural competency development will be challenging because it requires educators to "learn to relook, reconceptualize, reexamine, and rethink" (Miranda, 2008, p. 1743).

The second form of difficulty came from families from the mainstream culture who did not support the new teachers' attempts to introduce other cultures to children. Preservice programs should prepare students to work with parents who may resist multicultural practices because they disapprove of certain norms and values of other cultural groups. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) have stated that demographics and worldviews are rapidly changing, but the key question is whether teacher preparation programs are evolving as fast as our population. In light of the findings of the present study, preservice

programs have a crucial responsibility in this regard. Besides teacher education, professional development opportunities should be focused on helping teachers develop a genuine interest in and respect for cultural diversity. Teachers can feel more culturally competent if they do not always feel like they are walking on eggshells when dealing with cultural diversity. Teachers should also have opportunities to confront their own understandings of diversity. For example, do they view cultural or linguistic diversity as something that needs to be fixed in order to bring it to the norms? Alternatively, do they view diversity as an asset that will strengthen their teaching and learning? Such a holistic approach is likely to help teachers become more confident when working with parents whose backgrounds are different from their own culture or parents who refuse to acknowledge differences.

Preservice Education

When new teachers have difficulties in their relationships with parents, they question their competence. According to Katz (1996), with the growing understanding of the importance of parent involvement, teachers may worry about doing everything they know to tap the benefits of involving parents. New teachers were dissatisfied with some aspects of their preservice education because, in their opinion, there was an inconsistency between their teacher education programs and the real world of teaching, specifically as it related to parent–teacher relationships. In their opinion, the college courses focused on strategies and techniques to involve parents. The assumption seemed to be that the parents would respond positively, and both parties would work together for the children. Nevertheless, this was not always the case; thus, these new teachers felt ill equipped to deal with this reality. There is a similarity in the opinions of new teachers and teacher educators. Only 7.2% of teacher educators in a study by Epstein and Sanders (2006) strongly agreed that the new teachers who graduated from their programs were prepared to work with all students' families and communities. Further, there is a theory and practice binary, accordingly, students learn about teaching in the university, and they learn "how to" do teaching in the school (Thomson, 2000). New teachers' experiences indicate that the focus of their preservice education was on theories of partnership between school, family, and community; they were actively trying to develop such partnerships. However, they were unfamiliar with the kinds of problems that they encountered in their first year. Awareness of day-to-day practical problems should be a part of early childhood teacher education, as this is useful for new teachers who have yet to develop their own repertoire of experiences on which they can base their practices.

Another reason behind this lack of satisfaction with their preservice education could be attributed to the fact that many newcomers to the field misconstrue early childhood teaching as just being about liking children or an ability to have fun with them. The authentic view of early childhood teaching is that it is a complex, demanding job. Early childhood teachers have to understand and apply knowledge of childhood development. They provide a variety of experiences that build future competence in language and literacy, mathematics, and science, as well as in gross motor development, social skills, emotional understanding, and self-regulation. They need to develop relationships with children's families, additionally accommodating for diversity, inclusion, and equity. It would serve new teachers better if the difficulties that early childhood teachers face daily, such as those identified through this study, are disclosed to student teachers so that they feel better prepared. Teaching can be complex, ambiguous, and filled with dilemmas requiring ongoing learning; this is where in-service professional development becomes the lifeline for new teachers. According to Osterman and Kottkamp (2004), experiential learning theorists like Dewey and Piaget claim that learning is most effective when it begins with experience, in particular, experience that is problematic. Hence, supportive professional development can reassure new teachers that they should not view themselves as passive recipients of knowledge. They can learn and grow as teachers through collaboration, self-awareness, and self-reflection.

Professional Status

Parents' insufficient regard for the beginning early childhood teacher could be related to the paucity of value for teachers of young children or societal perceptions of this field. This absence of esteem seems to be almost universal. In the USA, early childhood education lacks status (Kagan, 2009). Internationally, "the status of teachers involved in early childhood education is considerably lower than teachers in primary and secondary levels" (Education International, 2010, p. 28). This lack of professional standing is summarized by Woodrow (2007) who states that early childhood work in the prior-to-school sector is considered "peripheral and low status, non-educational, and 'un-teacherly'" (p. 239). This is because those outside of the early childhood education sector do not understand the complex aspects of this job and its demands. When early childhood teachers have difficulties with parents, they may perceive that their professional status is questioned by parents. This requires a concerted effort to inform the parents about the multifaceted role of the teacher. Further, it is crucial for the field to move towards advocating for the role of the early childhood teacher at the community, state, and national levels.

Social Exchange Theory Framework

Documenting beginning teachers' concerns about parent–teacher relationships gives voice to the experiences and perceptions of those most directly involved. Parent and teacher relationships are assigned and not chosen and are prone to differing expectations and values. The parent–teacher partnership should be formed by a mutual aspiration to understand and consider diverse viewpoints through dialogue with each other. This reflects the conceptual framework of this study. In the social exchange theory, social actors form relationships when some purpose attracts them to one another—parents and teachers share a common interest in the child. The theory further posits that interpersonal relationships involve the exchange of rewards, some of which are altruistic in nature. It is contended that in this study, new teachers sought altruistic rewards, as they came into this profession wanting to help others. Social exchange theorists argue that all actors must reap some benefits from the exchange relationship; if actors fail to gain rewards in a relationship, they will cease their involvement in it. Based on the findings, it is cautioned that if new teachers feel that the relationship with parents is not helping them gain the altruistic rewards that initially attracted them to this position, then they might give up on trying to form a relationship with parents. This would be detrimental for all involved, including the children in these programs.

Limitations and Future Research

There is no attempt at generalizations in this study, rather the readers are invited to compare connections to their contexts. The sample size could be considered a limitation. However, this is a qualitative study, and the aim is to provide thick descriptions. The very nature of self-reported data is also a known limitation of research. Another related limitation was the voluntary nature of this study. This raises the question: Are the new teachers who did not volunteer more or less satisfied with this aspect of their work? A woman interviewing women can raise ethical concerns (Finch, 1984): Would the results be the same if this study was conducted by a male? Maxwell (1992) answers this best; according to him, an interview is a social relationship between the interviewer and the informant, therefore it must be understood that the informants' actions and views could be different in other situations. Therefore, the validity of an interview is in the account and not in the method or researcher.

This study was conducted when the participants were in their sixth or seventh month of their work; future research could consider additional follow-up interviews conducted later on in their careers. The study could also be replicated in the U.S. or other countries with a similar cohort. Another possibility

is to track teachers through their early careers in different work contexts, such as public or community kindergartens and privately owned preschools, to examine the subsequent differences or similarities in their experiences. It would be useful to ask the same questions of both new and experienced teachers in the same contexts. The study did not claim to be the voice of all stakeholders in early childhood education. However, parents' views on new teachers could provide a different perspective and lead to a more comprehensive representation of the research topic.

In today's society where the consumers' rights are paramount, it is likely that some parents see early childhood education programs as a commodity to parents-as-consumers. As in businesses, some people take the idea of consumer rights too far, without regard to the responsibility aspect. The findings suggest that early childhood teachers' concerns were about such parents. Thus, the relationship was one-sided with teachers making the effort to sustain it without reciprocity from these parents. Hence, this lack of reciprocity generated the problem of inequality in the relationship; this is reflective of the power-dependence paradigm of the social exchange theory. The difficulties that these early childhood teachers faced are also a result of the status of the profession—many parents have yet to acknowledge early education as a legitimate part of the education system, and thus they do not value the teachers. Parents who do not acknowledge the value of early childhood education programs miss the view of education in its broadest sense as it encompasses learning, care, and upbringing. If the parents are disengaged from their children's schools, it makes it problematic for the new teacher and leads to discontinuities in relationships. The successful functioning of a partnership is not possible without the active and willing participation of all members. It is a hope that this article provides possible avenues for revisiting an old concept such as new teachers facing difficulties in their work with their students' parents, even as it introduces opportunities to examine it from the perspective of new teachers who understand the value of these relationships and are making efforts to be inclusive of parental perspectives.

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