"There Was a Lot Going on Behind Them": Student Teachers' Access to Children and Their Families During Virtual Student Teaching

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Abstract

Traditionally pre-service teachers are undersupported as they develop culturally sustaining family engagement strategies through teacher preparation programming. As COVID-19 forced teachers, and in turn student teachers, to teach virtually, we explored how this setting affects student teacher access to students' home lives and families and impacts their view of future family engagement and teaching. We interviewed six elementary preservice teacher candidates who completed a semester of virtual student teaching. The shift to virtual instruction gave student teachers unprecedented access to students' personal lives and also gave families access to student teachers' practices. This newly acquired access presented multiple opportunities, challenges, and implications for candidates' teaching and development. This study highlights the need for teacher preparation programs to leverage student teachers' experiences to elevate culturally sustaining family engagement practices in their curriculum.

Keywords: virtual student teaching, family engagement, pandemic clinical experience

Building strong, collaborative partnerships with families is essential work for teachers as they try to foster students' academic and social-emotional development. However, educator preparation programs have not historically supported preservice teachers to engage productively with students' families (de Bruïne et al., 2018). Pre-service teachers often lack confidence and the support to meaningfully connect with and understand students' families during in-person clinical experiences like student teaching (Willemse et al., 2017). This is especially true of short-term clinical settings and teacher education programs that do not provide candidates with culturally sustaining pedagogies or experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2021; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). It is not surprising then, that more than seven in ten educators believe that it is challenging to engage families in the service of student learning and cite a lack of preparation as

one of their greatest barriers to increased family engagement (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2019).

Because many schools do not promote family engagement as a core teaching practice, they often limit interaction with families to traditional, school-sanctioned events such as Meet the Teacher Night, parent-teacher conferences, concerts, and sporting events. As Pushor (2010) notes, naming the opening school event Meet the Teacher instead of Meet the Family highlights a long-established "practice that centers the teacher as the focal point to schooling" (p. 4). Teachers who support pre-service candidates' field experiences and engage in such traditional forms of parent-teacher interaction may then reinforce schools as "marginalizing institutions that distort the interactions between teachers and parents in harmful ways… oftentimes reflect[ing], reinforc[ing], and reify[ing] the illness and inequity of the larger society" (Hong, 2019, p. 157).

What happens when such predictable forms of teacher-family collaboration and teacher preparation are disrupted by a pandemic? We know very little about how virtual settings— specifically online student-teaching contexts during a global pandemic—affect candidates' family engagement learning opportunities and practices. COVID-19 forced student teachers to dramatically alter their roles and responsibilities (Piccolo et al., 2021). While the transition from face-to-face to virtual student teaching stretched teacher preparation programs, candidates, and mentor teachers, these new virtual learning-to-teach settings "may also bring new perspectives and practices informed by their experiences, including an awareness of the equity issues raised by the pandemic" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

Through interviews with a cohort of six teacher candidates following their virtual student teaching experience, we examined the opportunities and challenges pre-service teachers experienced while engaging with families virtually. Specific research questions include: a)

Whether/to what extent did virtual student teaching settings impact access between families and student teachers? b) How did candidates describe opportunities to interact with families? and c) How did their student teaching experience impact their anticipated future family engagement effort?

Literature Review

In a recent report by the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (2019), the authors highlight the importance of teacher education programs increasing candidates' ability to meaningfully engage with students' families in four specific areas: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. The first component—developing teachers' capabilities—includes increasing human capital, skills, and knowledge of students, cultures, and families. Strengthening teachers' connections entails providing opportunities to build important relationships and networks (social capital) with their families and communities. Expanding cognition includes reflecting on and critiquing one's own assumptions, beliefs, and worldview, and fortifying teachers' confidence consists of individual levels of self-efficacy.

Walker (2019) further suggests that family engagement ought to be considered a "core practice" of teacher education programs requiring articulation, rehearsal, and critique of family engagement in authentic professional settings (Grossman et al., 2009). These suggestions are rooted in research that argues family engagement begins with teachers through genuine "invitations" (Anderson & Minke, 2007), and that extending more general invitations centered on activating social supports for families can be more effective than specific invitations centered on engaging families in home-based activities (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Authentic family engagement requires candidates to establish culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012). This includes: (a) understanding themselves as cultural beings with

multiple and intersecting identities; (b) examining the relationships between structural inequities in schools and communities; (c) understanding how activism and advocacy can disrupt inequities; (d) learning how to create inclusive, trusting, and equitable learning communities; and (e) building asset-based views not only of all students but also extending those strength-based views to families and communities (Paris & Alim, 2014). It further requires that teacher education programs center justice and consider if, how, and when "core practices" might mis/align with this commitment to justice (Philip et al., 2019).

The benefits of high-quality family engagement are well established. Family engagement has resulted in stronger student academic achievement and decreased dropout rates (Avvisati et al., 2014; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015). When teachers constructively engage families, students have better self-esteem, increased school attendance, and better behavior in school (Hirano & Rowe, 2016; Voorhis, 2011). In addition to student benefits, educators also benefit (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) through "improved job satisfaction and morale" and the ability to "navigate through the curriculum with greater efficiency and ease" (DeSpain et al., 2018, p. 236).

While student academic success has been linked to specific family engagement strategies (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2010), research has also unearthed specific barriers to preparing teachers with these critical components of family engagement. These include: (a) teacher education curriculum, (b) the uneven nature of candidates' clinical experiences, (c) a growing cultural mismatch between candidates and the students and families they are likely to serve, and (d) the complexity of social interactions (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Evans, 2013).

While the pandemic has disrupted certain mechanisms teachers use to foster affinity, bonding, and relation with students and their families, new virtual spaces do have potential to

bring students and their families in to further a "pedagogy of connection and broaden the landscape of learning in teacher education" (Carter Andrews et. al., 2021, p. 269). This study provides some insight into both opportunities and challenges virtual learning-to-teach spaces presented student teachers.

Theoretical Framework

We view the process of learning-to-teach through a sociocultural lens which frames student teaching as a social activity situated in multiple contexts both cultural and historical (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Virtual student teaching settings further allow us to view potential "third spaces" using critical theory. The concept of third spaces was initially developed by critical theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) who argued that marginalized people can create new spaces within existing official spaces by negotiating "the first space of their traditional culture and the second space of the more powerful and imposed colonising culture" (Johnston et al., 2021, p. 360). In the context of teacher education, third spaces can build bridges across discourse communities and enhance "the education of youth whose experiences have not traditionally been valued in schools" by validating home and community discourses for use within the school and classroom (Moje et al., 2004, p. 48).

To understand the impact of virtual student teaching settings on candidates' interactions with students' families, we use the Deweyan framework of whether their experience was educative versus mis-educative. Dewey (1938) defined an experience as educative when it creates the conditions that lead to further growth. In other words, an experience is educative when it draws on past experience in order to modify the quality of future experience through the creation of helpful habits and emotional/intellectual attitudes as well as the ability to respond to present conditions. In contrast, Dewey posited that an experience is mis-educative if it hampers

further growth. He believed that a mis-educative experience leads to "callousness" or generates

"a lack of sensitivity and responsiveness" later on (pp. 25-26).

Whether and how teacher preparation programs structure educative learning-to-teach

opportunities for candidates remains an important question for researchers to address (Jenlink &

Jenlink, 2019). Knowing how candidate experience family engagement in virtual contexts is key

to helping them develop culturally responsive teaching practices.

Methodology

This section describes data collection and the participants for this study, and then outlines

data analysis efforts.

Data Collection and Participants

We interviewed six senior undergraduate teacher candidates using a semi-structured

interview protocol via Zoom. Our goal in using an interview study was not to develop broad

theory or generalizable claims, but rather to better understand and communicate participants'

lived experiences by using and interpreting their own words as they describe and make sense of

those experiences (Creswell, 2007). Each interview lasted approximately 75-90 minutes and both

authors were present. Each interview was recorded and transcribed via Zoom. We also took

detailed notes during the interviews and created transcripts using both those running notes and

the Zoom transcription. The interview questions were organized in three categories. First,

candidates were invited to describe their two student teaching placements, including a) when and

how their learning-to-teach contexts became virtual and b) the structure of their student teaching

responsibilities. Second, the participants were invited to describe whether/how their teaching

practices changed in response to transitioning to virtual instruction. Finally, we asked candidates

to describe whether/how their interactions with children and their families were impacted by virtual learning-to-teach contexts.

  The participants' demographics reflect those of most candidates in their teacher preparation program: white, female, middle class, and Midwestern. Each candidate experienced two placements, both nine weeks in duration, spanning the range of their teaching license. Five of the six participants were placed in the same large district serving more than 20,000 diverse students in terms of: (a) racial identity, 41.6% White, 30.5% Hispanic, 9.1% Black, 8.0% Asian, 7.2% two or more, 3.6% American Indian; (b) disability, 15.2%; (c) economically disadvantaged, 64.5%; and (d) English learners, 20.7%. Table 1 describes each participant's virtual placements.

Table 1

Participant Student Teaching Placement Information

Student Teacher	Desired Teaching License(s)	Virtual Placement 1	Virtual Placement 2
Sandra	Pre-K – 5th grade	kindergarten rural elementary	5th grade urban elementary
Jennifer	1st – 8th grade Spanish & general elementary/middle	1st-5th grade Spanish urban elementary	Spanish urban middle school
Ivy	1st – 8th grade ESL & general elementary/middle	2nd grade urban elementary	7th gr. ELA/Social Studies urban middle school
Erin	1st – 8th grade	7th/8th grade ELA urban middle school	1st grade urban elementary
Abby	1st – 8th grade	8th grade ELA urban middle school	2nd grade urban elementary
Audry	Pre-K – 5th grade	kindergarten urban elementary	4th grade urban elementary

Researchers

Both researchers teach at the same small private, Midwestern liberal arts institution in the education discipline. Both researchers are Midwestern, cisgender, white, middle-class teachers turned teacher educators. Researcher 1 identifies as male and previously instructed all six research participants in education courses he taught. He had served as three of the six participants' field supervisor during their pre-clinical experience two years prior to student teaching. Researcher 2 identifies as female and had no prior experience with the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in multiple phases using a series of coding exercises and ongoing analytic memos (Miles et al., 2020). The initial phase included reviewing each transcript and developing descriptive analytic memos focused on each candidate's experience. Specifically, our first set of memos helped us clarify that all candidates discussed the unique opportunity and/or challenge presented by "seeing into their students' home lives." We then created a second set of transcripts that focused exclusively on that holistic code—comments made regarding children's home lives and interactions with students' families. After reading these condensed transcripts, we created analytic memos on each chunk of the six participants' data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Straus, 2008). The memos included direct quotes from the transcripts followed by descriptive analysis of those quotes.

Looking across those analytic memos, we then engaged in focused coding (Saldaña, 2013) to identify overarching themes across participants' experiences with children's home lives and interactions with families. One theme that emerged was the notion that candidates' computers provided them all a virtual "window" into students' home lives. Drawing on that concept of window, we jointly identified the following eight codes (a) window as invitation, (b) window as mirror, (c) window as another lens, (d) window as access, (e) window as missed opportunity, (f) window as concern, (g) window as barrier, and (h) other. Each researcher then separately returned to the condensed transcripts, independently coding each chunk of text into one of those eight categories. During this phase, we engaged in "member checking" by reaching back out to participants for clarification or elaboration on their interview responses.

Finally, in reviewing our independent coding efforts, we identified significant overlap in several of our initial codes which focused on student teachers' sense making/action. In addition,

we explicitly coded for impact on family's interactions with student teachers given the virtual teaching context. Our final categories, reflected in the organization of the findings section below, include (a) candidate access as opportunity, (b) candidate access as challenge, (c) family access to candidate practice, and (d) impact on candidates' future teaching.

Findings

Candidates' virtual teaching settings provided them intimate access to students' lives. Whether they experienced those opportunities and challenges as educative or miseducative while virtually student teaching varied by participant. Remote instruction also provided families with unaccustomed access to the candidates' practice. This unprecedented access between candidates, students, and families had significant implications for candidates' ideas about their future instruction.

Candidate Access as Opportunity to Learn

Five of the six candidates discussed their appreciation for the unparalleled access that virtual student teaching afforded them to students' home lives and families. Audry, an early childhood candidate, appreciated seeing into students' private homes. She described her young students as "never sitting still," walking around their homes as they held their electronic devices. Ivy described this rare window as both "another way of understanding kids" and "another lens" to "see what is going on" with her elementary and middle school students. In contrast, she explained that "we don't see a lot of that with in-person teaching." Sandra, too, found that during synchronous online instruction, she "...definitely saw a lot of their lives which was great! Little brothers and sisters [would] run around in the back, the dogs were barking… [and] parents were trying to get [students] on and off the computer." Virtually seeing into students' lives allowed Sandra to get to know her elementary students and their families.

Abby, an elementary/middle school candidate, admitted that "being able to see where the parents and students were felt weird at first." Knowing what students' families were doing all day led her to "put more emphasis on building relationships" not only with students but also their families. Contrasting virtual student teaching where she interacted daily with students' families to a lack of such exchanges in previous pre-clinical placements, she explained,

> In [pre-student teaching], I knew it was important to communicate with parents, but it was hard to push myself to talk with and do more with parents. In virtual teaching, we were forced to do more. Students needed help to get on the computer. We'd be on the phone, texting families throughout the day.

In this sense, learning to teach virtually gave her important new experiences to engage with families. Appreciative of these new family relationship-building interactions, Abby also noted how much families appreciated her efforts to communicate with them.

Like Abby, Erin, an elementary/middle school candidate, felt that virtual student teaching gave her increased access to students' families, particularly when her younger students encountered technological difficulties or required redirection beyond what Erin herself could offer. She noted,

> I had a lot of contact with first grade families. Most students had a parent at home… If they were having issues or I needed to get a kid to come back to the screen, I would yell, 'Hey, I need them to come back!' or send an email. If they were having technical issues, families would send things through the chat.

Erin appreciated the real-time opportunity to interact with families when children encountered challenges.

Learning about students' home lives also enabled the candidates to empathize more fully with students and their families. Ivy, for example, gained new insights into just how difficult learning from home was for children and parents alike. She recognized, "They were going through tons of stuff" and marveled at how students and families managed to keep it together. Ivy explained,

Kids [have] all these different backgrounds. It helps me know that even the students who don't appear to be struggling probably are… not just those with behavioral or academic issues. If students did not have trouble turning things in, there was still a lot going on behind them. I learned how resilient students are.

Although some students submitted assignments on time, Ivy's virtual access into their homes helped her realize that their ability to meet her expectations could not have been easy as children and families struggled through the pandemic. Ivy said of parents:

I didn't know how intense it would be…I would have parents who would cry. I had parents who would yell. I had access to the raw emotion they shared. The parents were right there next to the kids… and some worked all day and had to leave their 8- or 10-year old at home alone all day because they didn't have another option… It was difficult and scary and hard, but I would have never been able to expose myself to it in a regular teaching situation.

Ivy appreciated and empathized with families, including the difficult decisions they faced each day as they expressed their emotions through the computer screen. Her virtual student teaching experience enriched her understanding of children's families in ways that Ivy doesn't believe would have happened otherwise.

Jennifer, too, deepened her empathy for students' families as she witnessed them supporting children's learning from home. An elementary/middle school generalist and Spanish teacher candidate, she recognized that families most likely felt inundated with information about how their children were expected to participate virtually, including multiple zoom links, learning management systems, and online assignments. She "didn't want to flood parents" who were already overwhelmed with school communications. As a foreign language teacher, she relied on homeroom teachers to directly communicate with students' families. That said, she "introduced" herself and told families "what their child was doing really well" whenever she had a chance to interact with them virtually.

Candidate Access as Challenge to Engage Students

While nearly all six student teachers viewed their virtual access to students' home lives as an opportunity, they also experienced this access as a challenge, including engaging students while in their home environments. All six student teachers had two separate placements, one with younger children and another with older students. They found that while younger students and their families were typically present during synchronous virtual instruction, candidates' access to students and families decreased as students' ages increased. Sandra, for example, explained that "student engagement was especially hard" with her fifth graders. She noted, "A lot of the kids have hard home lives without a lot of support. They were in charge of themselves, doing homework and getting it in on time." Erin, too, struggled to keep her middle schoolers engaged. Erin shared, "Going into student teaching, I thought it would have been my first graders who would struggle to stay in front of the camera, but it was my middle schoolers." She found that while first graders were sometimes distracted, as she explained,

…middle schoolers' attention wasn't always on the screen. They might be logged in but

have their camera and mic off. They might be somewhere else. They didn't have the best

home life and didn't want us to see that which I totally understand.

In this sense, Erin empathized with her students, believing that those who did not turn their

cameras or microphones on deliberately chose to do so to keep her from seeing their home lives.

On the other hand, she seemed to suggest that middle schoolers "are just at that age," something

she discussed with her university supervisor and peers during a weekly student teaching seminar.

Like Erin who felt challenged to provide virtual instruction when students kept their

cameras and or mics off, Ivy also expressed concern about students who were less engaged

virtually. She found that her older students "would play video games during the school day." Ivy

was concerned by what she did see when they turned their camera on. She explained:

I saw a lot more than I thought I'd ever see… That was sometimes harder because

you see what they are going through and are compelled to feel bad for them. And

you don't want to seem too empathetic and don't want to appear as though I'm

focusing too much on their situation and see them for who they are. It's easier at

school because we aren't in their bedroom or in their kitchen or with their sibling

or parents. It's hard to see past it…

Although Ivy had earlier stated that she gained empathy for students' families by seeing into

their home lives, she later felt bad about what she saw of their private lives. She wanted "to see

past it" but struggled to know what to do with the information she gained virtually. Ivy

explained, "It does create an opportunity to see what happens outside of school that we can't fix.

We are presented with a lot more information which can be good and bad."

Ivy was not alone in feeling challenged by what she saw when students turned on their cameras and microphones. Audry did as well, explaining, "It was hard to see those home lives and be unsure [whether] they are getting everything they need."

Audry voiced concerns about the level of noise and activity she witnessed in her students' homes:

> I learned that their home lives are very noisy, like there's constantly stuff going on in their lives... You can't even hear them with all the other noise going on. I just can't even imagine trying to learn in that type of environment. If this is what's happening 24/7, how are they actually getting stuff done? I don't think my eyes were open to that in [pre-clinical student teaching] and really understanding what went on at home.

Audry seemed to surface an assumption she had about learning, namely that it requires quiet. She viewed activity and noise in children's homes as a barrier to students' ability to focus and learn.

Candidate Access as Challenge to Meet Families' Expectations and Needs

Just as the student teachers had unprecedented access to students' home lives, they also recognized that families themselves had equally unprecedented access to instruction. Families continuously helped their child log in, log off, keep to the schedule, and complete assignments. As Audry explained, "In the same way that we were getting to see their life, they were getting to see ours. I had to be mindful of everything I said. Parents were always there, even if you could not see them." Virtual student teaching provided a unique window into student teachers' work lives to which families normally do not have access.

Because of this access to candidates' teaching, some parents were positioned to advocate for their children in real time. Audry, for example, described a specific incident where a

grandparent voiced concern after her grandson had raised his hand several times but had not yet been called on. Even though Audry had two screens open to foster her virtual interaction with students, she had not been aware of the child's raised hand because she could not always see every child. She thanked the grandparent for bringing the child's desire to participate to her attention.

Audry was not the only one who felt mindful of family members' presence. Jennifer expressed deep appreciation that "parents got to be part of the classroom since the classroom was at home." Jennifer loved brief positive virtual interactions with families, including parents who would appear and wave to her in the background. Jennifer also started every third and fourth grade class with a song which parents looked forward to hearing. Her students' families seemed to enjoy Jennifer as well. One child's family told Jennifer's mentor, "I love listening to Spanish." That said, sometimes families' access to her practice felt "intimidating" to Jennifer and added "extra pressure." She felt it was "nerve wracking to see parents walking around. Do they think I'm doing a good job?" Jennifer clearly cared about what her teaching conveyed to students' families and how they interpreted what they observed as Jennifer supported students' learning. Abby also felt a sense of "vulnerability" while also believing that parents appreciated her efforts.

Impact on Future Teaching

All six participants anticipated that their access to students' home lives and families would impact their future practice. Three themes emerged as they described future goals: (a) establishing the classroom environment, (b) meeting students' social-emotional and academic needs, and (c) communicating with and engaging families.

Structure of Classroom Environment

As stated earlier, Audry was surprised and concerned by the noise level in some students'

homes. As she considered her future classroom, however, she described her desire for "balance":

I don't want their classroom environment to be so overstimulating, but I don't

want it to be under-stimulating because if that's everything you are getting at

home, if it's completely quiet [at school] that might just bug the heck out of you,

and you can't actually focus in that [quiet]. I think that for noise, just to try to

balance it. Music definitely helps… It shouldn't be quiet. It should still have some

organization to it, but there should be collaboration and talking.

Audry's virtual student teaching experience where she witnessed high levels of noise in

students' homes impacted the noise level and activity she hoped to maintain once in her

own classroom. She wants to have "organized chaos" where music and student voices are

continuously heard.

Meeting Students' Social-Emotional and Academic Needs

Three of the six participants discussed plans to adjust their expectations or

differentiate instruction to meet students' varying needs given the window they were

given into students' home lives. Audry noted, "I really want to try to understand their

home life. I know I can do better. What I'm teaching is far less important, especially if

they haven't gotten their needs met." Audry expressed a desire to remember that in

addition to providing academic instruction, she also needed to meet the needs of the

whole child.

Sandra, too, stated that virtual student teaching prepared her "to look beyond what you

see in a classroom" and attend to the "well-being of students."

They have a whole life outside of the classroom that I wouldn't have seen if I

hadn't been invited to be in their homes every day. It opened me to what is on the

inside of these children… Social-emotional learning is huge. I'm going to use it

so often in my classroom. I have a better approach to understanding the well-

being of students and taking it upon myself to make sure they are mentally and

emotionally okay before taking on academics.

Like Audry, Sandra felt that her access to students' home lives deepened her understanding of

difficulties students experienced beyond academic learning. She hoped to be attuned to future

students' lives both in and beyond the classroom to better meet their social, emotional, and

academic learning needs. As she stated later in the interview, she hoped to "have more of an

understanding of students and why they are acting how they are, why they might be unmotivated

one day and super motivated another." She further aspired to address their needs and challenges,

be that by herself or through connecting them and their families to additional services. She really

wants "greater understanding and acceptance of different situations students are dealing with."

Ivy, too, felt that virtual student teaching helped her better understand messages that children's

behavior communicates which in turn "helps me see if my students' needs are being met which

impacts how they learn."

Jennifer also described her continued commitment to build classroom learning

community to find out who her students are and use that knowledge to create engaging learning

experiences. In one of Jennifer's placements, she spent the first five minutes in each of her

Spanish classes checking in with students to "build and share personal connections" throughout

class. Asking them what they had for dinner or what they had done the night before helped her

"pay attention to what excited them." She then intentionally drew on her knowledge of students'

strengths and interests when designing Spanish lessons tailored to each individual class that she taught for 30 minutes once a week.

Communicating With and Engaging Families

Four of the six student teachers expressed a strong desire to continue communicating with and engaging students' families once in their own classrooms. Erin felt that her virtual student teaching experience had helped her "feel more comfortable talking to parents as that's so intimidating to do" and believed she would be more inclined to interact with future families. Abby committed to "breaking down what is happening in the classroom with parents." She described wanting to share weekly emails with families to help them stay informed. In addition, she hoped to "find ways that [families] can participate…or volunteer in the classroom." Jennifer, too, thought carefully about how she can continue to foster families' intimate involvement once students return to school. She wants families to feel "excited about what we are doing" and committed to providing families with opportunities to "come into the classroom in any way, shape, or form."

Ivy also described appreciating getting to know parents' feelings even though she did not always feel confident responding in real time to the emotions families shared. She recognized that "how parents are feeling can also really affect the children that I'm working with. I think it's important to build rapport with the families of my students and if they are having a hard time, how can I support them?" Ivy identified parents' impact on their children and hoped to support both her students and families once in her own classroom.

Discussion

This study builds understanding in two key areas. First, it provides teacher educators with hope that virtual learning-to-teach settings can create educative opportunities for candidates to

meaningfully engage children's lives and families. On the other hand, this same access provides teacher educators with caution that virtual family access can be miseducative, serving to reinforce candidates' underlying assumptions, beliefs, and world views of students and families if left unexamined.

For the six participants, their newfound virtual access to families had significant potential to deepen students' understanding of and empathy for students and their families. Since both candidates and students' families were "at home," the shared virtual space helped create a more neutral "third space" in which teacher candidates and families could engage (Johnston et. al., 2021). The virtual student teaching context created reciprocal access to one another's lives and work which seemed to lead to genuine appreciation of each other. Families could see the daily work of candidates' teaching. Further, student teachers viewed children as more than students. They got to see the family members who their students live with in real time, what their daily life was like, and what students might be challenged with and/or proud of outside of the classroom. This unprecedented access to students' home lives provided candidates with a more empathic view of children and families, and positively influenced their goals for future instruction and continued family engagement once in their own classrooms.

That said, this same access and interaction may also lead to miseducative learning opportunities. Participants' descriptions echoed what research already tells us, namely that candidates often feel ill-equipped to engage families in meaningful ways beyond sharing and/or imparting information (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2019). While virtual student teaching experiences created new opportunities to communicate with families, many of the participants felt uncertain how to respond in the moment when families initiated virtual interaction.

Only one participant spoke in concrete ways about how they built on knowledge gained from families to inform their instructional choices. A foundational tenet of meaningful family engagement is the ability to view students' lives outside of school as important "funds of knowledge" during instruction (Paris & Alim, 2017). Funds of knowledge refer to the ingenuity, languages, legacies, rich values, and sophisticated practices within children's families and communities. It was less clear how virtual student teaching helped candidates identify the families' funds of knowledge. This study serves as an important reminder that connections do not always lead to educator capabilities.

While it was beyond the scope of this study to determine whether and how teacher educators supported candidates in critically surfacing and evaluating their assumptions and sense-making during virtual student teaching, we know the potential for miseducative experiences—those that shut down further learning—is very real.

Implications

As more candidates experience virtual student teaching settings, teacher educators must investigate and make sense of how such virtual settings influence candidates' views of and interactions with children and families. Many of our participants' descriptions of their experiences revealed assumptions and beliefs they held regarding children's lives outside of school. The structure and level of noise in a child's home as well student and family needs were all issues that the candidates reckoned with, and in some cases, they were unable to push past a dominant culture interpretation of those beliefs. In this way, our findings reinforce calls for teacher education programs to increase the importance of family engagement curriculum to address gaps in teacher candidates' confidence, cognition, connections, and capabilities. Specifically, "cultural responsiveness and critical caring [is] foundational to elevating the human

aspects of teaching essential for developing and sustaining the types of relationships that teachers can and should have with students and families in these new learning contexts" (Carter Andrews et al., 2021).

Establishing clearly defined goals for candidate-family engagement and identifying professional standards by which programs can assess candidates' skills in doing so are important first steps (Walker, 2019). In addition, teacher preparation programs must also create educative experiences for candidates to learn about and partner with students' families. At Ball State University, for example, teacher candidates are paired with community and family members. Candidates might attend church or other community events with a family in order to identify the many ways that families support children's learning and growth outside of formal school settings. Candidates might also ask a family or community member to serve as a curriculum consultant for lessons they will soon teach (Zygmunt et al., 2016).

Programs also need to further develop candidates' historical understanding of the ways in which schools/teachers have misunderstood families (Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010) and examine how certain families have been traditionally marginalized in schools, including families feeling uncomfortable walking into a school or speaking with teachers (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Candidates also need educative, scaffolded opportunities to surface, evaluate, and potentially transform their own assumptions and beliefs about families (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). Candidates can develop the confidence and capacity to disrupt marginalizing family engagement practices when their teacher preparation program integrates family engagement curriculum into foundational courses, uses text and multimedia representations of family engagement practices, and designs family engagement simulations for candidates to practice and foster skills (Walker, 2019).

Teacher education programs can help candidates view successful family engagement as an issue of educational equity, build connections that cultivate relationships and trust with all families, and invite meaningful two-way conversations where teachers emerge as collaborative leaders deeply invested in families and communities (Hong, 2019). In addition to strengthening family engagement strategies and curriculum in teacher education programs, next steps include continuing to identify and research teacher preparation programs that *do* focus on family engagement and determine whether and how they develop teacher candidates' confidence, cognition, connections, and capabilities.

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