

Preparation for family-school partnerships within initial teacher education programmes in England.

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Abstract

The few studies conducted in Europe to date suggest that little attention is paid to pre-service teacher preparation for family-school partnerships (FSP) and that many teachers feel unprepared for such work. In England there has been little research in this area but a government review of best practice in parental involvement with schools concluded that *'(t)eachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents ...'* (Goodhall & Vorhaus, 2011: p6). Given the apparent discrepancy between the need for teachers to be more knowledgeable about FSP and the lack of opportunity within initial teacher education (ITE) programmes to address the issues, we carried out a national survey of ITE providers in England in order to ascertain what provision is currently on offer. Our findings indicate that while there is overall recognition of the value of preparing trainee teachers to become confident and knowledgeable about home-school partnerships, ITE providers feel constrained by the lack of time available to them to explore this area in greater detail. The article concludes by discussing some of the challenges of both planning and delivering effective FSP provision within the ITE curriculum and how this might relate to future professional learning.

Keywords: family-school partnerships, initial teacher education (ITE), ITE curriculum,

England

Introduction

Family school partnership (FSP) has been defined as ‘a child-focused approach wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains’ and which seeks ‘to enhance student outcomes through development of cross-system supports and continuities across settings’ (Sheridan et al. 2012, 3). The value of effective FSP is widely recognised as increasing parental involvement in a child’s education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Goodhall and Vorhaus 2011), which in turn can lead not only to improvements in behaviour and attendance (Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Sheldon and Epstein 2002) but also to improvement in pupil attainment (Galindo and Sheldon 2012; Higgins and Katsipataki 2015; See and Gorard 2015). The extensive literature in this area incorporates both studies that focus on increasing parental involvement (Epstein 2001; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1995, 1997) and those that focus on barriers to such involvement, such as Hornby and Lafaele’s (2011) framework, which identifies four kinds of factor as being significant: individual parent and family factors; child factors; parent-teacher factors and societal factors (2011, 39). There is, however, limited evidence in relation to the causal links between interventions specifically designed to increase parental involvement and improvements in pupil attainment (Gorard and See, 2013; Sheridan et al. 2012).

The importance of teacher preparation for FSP has also been highlighted extensively in the literature (Epstein and Sanders 2006; Epstein 2013; Evans 2013; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider and Lopez 1997). Daniel calls for a ‘pedagogical reconceptualisation’ (2011, 166) of FSPs

and, using Grossman and McDonald's (2008) notion of pedagogies of enactment, argues that the establishment of such partnerships constitutes a core professional skill which requires development within any programme of initial teacher education (ITE). The preparation offered within ITE, is, however, generally considered to be inadequate. Baum and Swick (2008), investigating FSP in relation to the preparation of early childhood educators in the United States, highlight the lack of attention given to it and focus on the need for teacher education programmes to equip pre-service (trainee) teachers with the dispositions necessary to enable them to establish such partnerships effectively. This is of particular importance during the ITE phase since there may be few subsequent opportunities for teachers to focus on this kind of professional learning once they are working full-time in the classroom (Hiatt-Michael 2001). It is in this context that we set out to explore, through a national survey, the way in which FSP issues are currently being addressed in ITE programmes in England. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) are clear that training programmes should offer sufficient opportunities for contact with parents and carers, but Allestaht-Snyder and Schwartz (2001) go further and emphasise the value of practitioner inquiry approaches (for both pre-service and in-service teachers) that focus on FSP.

Teacher education programmes that have attempted to introduce more FSP learning opportunities for trainee teachers do report benefits in terms of increases in both the confidence and awareness of those trainees, as well in their ability to use the knowledge gained to improve their teaching. Data on the impact of such an approach has, however, tended to derive from studies of single programmes, few of which prepare secondary school

teachers (Evans 2013). The small number of studies that has so far been conducted in Europe also suggests that little attention is paid overall to FSP in teacher education and that trainee teachers feel unprepared to establish such partnerships (de Bruïne et al. 2014; Willemse, Vloeberghs, de Bruïne, and Van Eynde 2016). In England, specifically, there has been little research in this area, although a 1998 study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, examining the relationships between schools, family and the community, indicated that ‘(t)eacher-training is a limited preparation for the community approach’ (Mog 1998, 3); while a relatively recent government review of best practice in parental involvement with schools concluded that ‘[t]eachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents ...’ (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011, 6).

Evidence suggests that many newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in England do not feel well prepared for communicating with parents and carers. Within primary schools [t]his is one of the areas in which NQTs felt their training had prepared them less well for teaching in comparison to other areas (NCTL 2015) and for those in secondary schools ‘this remains one of the least positively rated aspects of teacher training’ (NCTL 2015, 82, paragraph 6.7.2). Furthermore these figures have remained consistently low from year to year in comparison with how well prepared NQTs feel in other areas of their professional practice. In spite of this perception, the opportunity to develop FSP competences has not been given any prominence in the recently published ‘*Framework of core content for initial teacher training*’ (DfE 2016a), where reference to teachers’ interactions with parents is made only in relation to parents’ meetings and to providing feedback to parents and carers on pupil progress. The

aim of this article is therefore to explore more fully the nature of current provision for FSP within ITE programmes in England.

Frameworks for analysing FSP in ITE programmes

Examining a range of programmes in the United States for the Harvard Family Study report, Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez (1997) begin by highlighting the potential barriers to the inclusion of FSP preparation in teacher education programmes, including: a lack of national requirements and models to adopt; the difficulty of integrating new content within current programmes; limited resourcing; and negative attitudes among programme leaders. They go on to provide a typology for developing FSP in teacher education programmes which focuses on the seven content areas of:

- General family involvement;
- General family knowledge;
- Home school communication;
- Family involvement in learning activities;
- Families supporting schools;
- Schools supporting families;
- Families as change agents.

Within each of these areas the authors identify ‘the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that teachers need to work effectively with parents’ (19). These attitudes, skills and knowledge

requirements are further delineated within each of the above content areas according to four different approaches, each of which is drawn from a related theoretical perspective:

(1) a functional approach that describes the roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents in promoting student achievement; (2) a parent empowerment approach based on the strengths of disenfranchised families; (3) a cultural competence approach that makes the school an inclusive, respectful setting where diversity is welcomed; and (4) a social capital approach that builds community support for education. (20)

Although this report is now relatively dated, such an approach nevertheless provides a useful framework when considering the content of teacher education programmes and the skills and knowledge that trainee teachers might need to develop and the authors conclude with a series of recommendations to enhance FSP within ITE.

A wider conceptual model, which similarly takes account of attitudinal factors but which also examines organisational and structural issues such as pupil age and attainment levels as well as wider contextual factors, is presented in the framework first developed by Epstein (1987, 2001). This framework has been further elaborated by Epstein and Sanders (2006) and is presented as a 'theory of overlapping spheres of influence' (87) in which dynamic external contexts (such as home, school and community) interact with internal structures involving interpersonal relationships and communication. Epstein and Sanders use this model of dynamic contexts as a lens to examine the way in which pre-service teachers are

prepared in terms of FSP (based on a survey of 161 Deans of Education across the United States) and conclude that although there had been some improvements in provision over the previous decade, as well as an increased awareness of the need to integrate FSP preparation within teacher education programme, still more was needed. They also identify a range of 'structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors' (109) which may account for differences in provision across teacher education programmes nationally, including 'faculty resistance to change, state laws that restrict additions to teacher education programs, and university procedures that delay changes in course offerings and graduation requirements' (111).

In conclusion, what emerges is the lack of any single over-arching FSP concept, but rather a complex range of differing but inter-related concepts that together constitute the notion of what might be considered as 'competence' in this area. Beyond the detailed knowledge (drawn from a number of different domains - see above), the practical skills and the wider understanding required by teachers to engage effectively with FSP issues there are also attitudinal factors (determined by individual dispositions) that come into play. The FSP components of any ITE curriculum will therefore need to reflect this complexity, in terms of both the content to be covered and the range of approaches adopted within the training programme (including, among others, specific didactical approaches, experiential learning opportunities and inquiry-based learning), all of which are relevant for a study of the policy context in England.

The policy context in England

The particular nature of the policy context in England gives rise to specific factors which might be seen either to facilitate or constrain the inclusion of FSP in ITE programmes. First, following major reform that took place around 25 years ago, the amount of practicum time that must be included as part of any ITE programme in England has been fixed at a statutory minimum of 120 days within a one-year postgraduate programme and 160 days within a four-year undergraduate programme. Second, policy reform from 2010 onwards saw the development of 'school-led teacher training' and a rapid expansion of government accredited training 'providers' (comprising both traditional higher education institution (HEI) providers, the number of which has remained stable, and School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, the number of which has increased significantly). This policy has led to the re-shaping of ITE in England, giving rise to particular tensions around differing conceptions of teacher education pedagogy between universities and schools (Brown, Rowley, and Smith, 2016). Third, in order to gain Qualified Teacher Status in England, every aspiring teacher has to meet the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2013) which set out the minimum expected competences for qualification; furthermore, these standards are aligned with the recommended 'core content' of ITE programmes (DfE 2016a).

This general policy context could be seen as significantly enhancing the scope for effective development of FSP content within ITE programmes in England. The 120-day minimum requirement for the practicum for all postgraduate ITE programmes is among the highest in Europe (European Commission 2015) and would seem to offer greater opportunities for trainee teachers to explore issues around FSP in the school context, including wider community involvement and interaction with families themselves. It could equally be

argued, however, that such programmes allow less time during the remaining days of an ITE programme for a fuller exploration of attitudes and dispositions around FSP and may therefore tend to promote a narrower focus on the functional aspects of the issue. The nature of the Teacher Standards in England can be similarly interpreted as providing an important boost for preparation in FSP, while perhaps undermining the likelihood of this outcome actually being achieved. They make it explicit that one aspect of a teacher's 'wider professional responsibilities' is the ability to 'communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being' (DfE 2013, Standard 8), thereby making it obligatory for all ITE programmes to equip potential new entrants to the profession with this competence. The fact that this is the only reference to parents within the Teachers' Standards is, however, a matter of some concern, suggesting that trainee teachers may be offered a very narrow conception of FSP that appears to require nothing more of them than the ability to give feedback to parents and carers about the progress of an individual child.

While the literature emphasises the need for teachers to be more knowledgeable about home-school partnerships (so that they can fully appreciate the benefits that can accrue from positive interventions aimed at promoting closer collaboration between schools and parents/carers), the policy frameworks that shape teacher education programmes in England appear to provide little impetus for such knowledge to be developed. With this discrepancy in mind, and in order to understand better the nature of current provision in England, we carried out a national survey of teacher training providers, including traditional university providers and those schools that now have responsibility for delivering ITE programmes (either in partnership with universities through the School Direct route, or as

SCITTs). The survey was intended to provide data which would help us to address two key questions:

- i. What is the nature of provision for FSP issues within ITE programmes in England currently?
- ii. What factors influence the extent to which FSP issues are addressed within individual programmes?

Methods

In order to collect the required data an online questionnaire was devised, based closely on the survey described above (Epstein and Sanders 2006), and an invitation to participate was sent electronically to Deans of Education (or their equivalent) and other teacher education programme leaders in England. We adopted a convenience sampling approach, using an accessible method to make the survey available to as wide a range of providers as possible. The invitation to participate and the survey link were sent out through the mailing networks of two large professional organisations – the University Council for the Education of Teachers (representing the universities that offer teacher education programmes) and the National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers. Although this method allowed us to circulate the invitation very widely - to approximately 130 providers - it resulted in a low level of response (received from just 22 separate providers), meaning that is not possible to generalise with any confidence from the findings. Indeed it is reasonable to

conjecture that the programmes that did choose to respond actually place a stronger emphasis on FSP than those that did not.

Twenty-two responses were received from the national survey; 15 from HEI providers and 7 from SCITT providers. Providers reported that those completing the specified programme typically went on to teach in a range of different contexts.

Eighteen respondents were responsible for programmes for which 'core' training places had been allocated directly by the government. Four of the programme leaders who responded (two HEI and two SCITT providers) were responsible for what the government refers to as 'school-led' provision; that is to say School Direct training programmes, or for a combination of core provision and School Direct provision. Nineteen responses related to postgraduate programmes, with three relating to undergraduate provision. The age phase on which the programmes focussed was as follows:

Early Years and Primary combined	5
Primary	7
Secondary	10

The size of the programmes in terms of trainee numbers ranged from 400 down to 13, with the mean trainee number being 130 and the median being 97.

Findings

The findings presented here draw on the survey responses, focusing on both the way in which FSP is currently being addressed within ITE programmes in England and the factors that influence the nature of such provision.

When asked whether their current teacher education programme offered one or more short courses that focussed specifically on parental/carers involvement and/or partnerships between schools, families and the community, 13 programme leaders stated that there was no such provision; seven (a slightly larger proportion of which were SCITTs) explained that their programme included one short course, while just one provider reported offering two or more short courses of this nature. These short courses were included within programmes with 'umbrella' titles such as Professional studies; Home School links; Understanding and building relationships; Child Development; Dealing with parents; Working in partnership within the school community; Working with other adults. In all cases these were compulsory modules. Specific examples of these short courses included a contribution to the programme led by a psychiatrist; a 'Professional Studies' day; input that includes the family/adults' roles in the school in support of their children; and a lecture that formed part of a module within the programme on wider school issues. One provider noted that similar themes are also covered in the partnership's 'Closing the Gap' units.

Fifteen respondents indicated that FSP-related issues are dealt with elsewhere, within other parts of the programme, such as the wider professional studies programme; a 'Reflective Professional' module; a 'Child development' module'; and modules linked to the theme of

‘Learning and Teaching’. Once again these modules are compulsory for all trainees on the programme. Eight programme leaders among our respondents set out the specific content in these areas (coverage of which is generally spread over more than one teaching session). These content areas have been organised by the researchers into broad categories, summarised in Table 1. When examined in relation to the seven areas of content identified by Shartrand et al. (1997) for development of FSP in teacher education programmes (see above), it can be seen that most of the content areas highlighted by participants in our study fall into the categories of either ‘General family knowledge’ or ‘Home school communication’. There is little evidence in the data of a focus on ‘Families supporting schools’ or ‘Schools supporting families’, or on the agentic role of parents and carers in their children’s education.

(insert Table 1 here)

The figures in Table 2 indicate that the aspects of FSP preparation (following the themes identified in the Epstein and Sanders (2006) survey) that appear most frequently in the programmes of those who responded to this particular question (n=17, representing seven HEI secondary postgraduate programmes, three HEI primary postgraduate programmes, two HEI primary undergraduate programmes and five SCITT postgraduate primary programmes) were: collaborating with other agencies (e.g. social workers, the police, youth workers, medical professionals); parental/carers' involvement in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); how to organise and conduct a parent-teacher

meeting; and statutory requirements in relation to the involvement of parents/carers and parental involvement and partnerships between schools, families and the community.

(insert Table 2 here)

The areas where there is currently less coverage in individual programmes were: coordinating resources from local businesses and the community to support pupils' learning; how to organise and run a workshop for parents/carers; and collaborating with parents in a parent-school council.

In terms of the topics not currently included, there was no overwhelming response which indicated that any one topic is strongly under-represented in existing provision, except in relation to 'research into partnerships between schools, families and the community'; 11 of the 17 respondents (spread across both HEI providers and SCITTs) indicated that they thought this should be developed further. Interestingly eight of these responses were from those responsible for HEI programmes, where one might have anticipated more evidence of the integration of research perspectives. Likewise six of the seven responses reporting the need to include more theoretical perspectives on FSP came from the HEI respondents who ran secondary programmes. Respondents from the latter in particular also acknowledged the need for more coverage in their teacher education programmes of ways of involving parents, carers and others from the local community in schools. The topic that the greatest proportion of respondents did not currently provide and did not necessarily think needed to be introduced was 'coordinating resources from local businesses and the community to support pupils' learning'; nine of the 15 respondents (again from both types of providers but

proportionately slightly more so from SCITTs) whose programmes do not currently deal with this topic, did not think it was necessary for them to do so. Overall it was the primary phase SCITT providers who appeared less inclined to believe that certain elements should be included if they were not currently part of the programme, but it would be dangerous to assume on the basis of our limited numbers that this distribution represents a significant difference between the primary and secondary phase. Individual comments revealed that while the desire is there to integrate more aspects of FSP into the teacher education curriculum, one of the key constraints is the time available within an already full programme:

The pressure is fitting all of the above in a tight 36 week programme (Secondary HEI provider).

One respondent also expressed the view that preparation for FSP work is perhaps better suited to post-qualification learning opportunities, particularly in the induction year for NQTs. Nearly half the respondents thought that FSP receives sufficient attention within current programmes, whereas two-fifths suggested that they thought it warranted greater attention than they had chosen to allocate to it. Four respondents felt that FSPs was best covered elsewhere, either through in-service training opportunities or informally as part of school-based training experiences.

All but one of 17 respondents strongly agreed or agreed that it is important in each case for all teachers, school leaders and any other adults working with children in the school to know how to work in ways that support parental/carers involvement and partnerships between schools, families and the community. Only 11 of the 17, however, agreed that their recent

graduates had been completely prepared to collaborate effectively with the parents/carers of all pupils, again because of the pressures of trying to cover a wide range of important issues within the ITE programme:

I think at this stage of a new teacher's career there is only so much they can be prepared for and it is really through the NQT and RQT years that these skills get developed. We can prepare them by helping them understand the importance / relevance of effective partnership, to identify the forms it takes in school, and the issues they might face. I think we do this well. (Early Years/primary SCITT provider).

All thought it important that trainees' skills in involving parents/carers, families and the community could be demonstrated both during the period of their initial training and at the end of the training programme, and that the demonstration of these skills would depend on knowledge acquired from a range of sources. Furthermore, all thought it important that the skills could be demonstrated both in schools with a high proportion of pupils from a disadvantaged background and in schools in less challenging circumstances.

Just under half of the providers reported that a trainee had specifically focussed on FSP issues in the past three years, for example as part of a written assignment, and of those seven said that more than ten trainees per programme had done so. Two thirds of the providers were not aware of any research by staff being carried out within their own institutions related to FSP-related issues but for the third that were aware of such research, the focus was on FSP issues as part of a wider field, often related to SEND. Only one provider reported that a member of staff within the institution had carried out research work specifically related to FSP issues; this was a doctoral study.

In terms of general levels of preparedness, 12 respondents claimed that they would consider their trainees, on graduation from the programme, to be competent to work as a teacher in collaborating with all parents, families and the community, and thus to enhance the learning and outcomes of their pupils. Two respondents assumed that their trainees would not only be fully prepared to collaborate with these different stakeholders but also that they would be able to develop and implement initiatives to support parental/carer involvement and partnership. There were, however, some caveats, reflected in the following comments:

They may feel prepared to report to parents at parents' meetings but perhaps not beyond that. (Secondary HEI provider)

Some schools will not enable trainees to work with parents – they appear to wish to protect them. This has a limiting effect on their training. (Primary HEI provider)

Again, I think whilst they need to be 'prepared', it is the core classroom skills that take up all the focus and need securing before issues relating to wider engagement, which need longer to be developed. (Early years/primary SCITT provider)

Other comments reflect a view that so much depends on the experiences gained during the practicum experience in a specific school. In other words, the programme leaders essentially highlighted the variability in what their student-teachers learned, without addressing the limitations of FSP preparation in their programmes.

Comments about developing this aspect of the programmes were balanced between those suggesting ways of developing trainees' knowledge about the issues (for example, introducing sessions that focus more on the relationship between the school and the local

community; developing a better understanding of the relationship between parental involvement and student progress; an increased on statutory requirements) and those focussing on more experiential learning (for example, inviting parents in to talk with trainees about their involvement with schools; developing projects that involve FSP working). Ten respondents said that they envisaged further programme developments related to FSP in the next two years, but that the capacity to develop such components was limited by a range of factors, including: workload issues; the willingness or even capacity of school-based colleagues to introduce this issue into the school-based programme; an already full ITE curriculum; and limited time for planning and implementation.

Discussion

The nature of the ITE curriculum

While the literature discussed in the introduction to this paper has suggested that FSP comprises a complex range of inter-related concepts, it is clear that the preparation of trainee teachers for FSP needs to be addressed in a planned and integrated way, especially if it is to go beyond a purely functional approach. Our findings suggest that FSP is generally not treated as a 'stand-alone' topic with minimal coverage on a limited number of occasions (within either the provider-delivered or the school-based programme), although this is an option that has been proposed elsewhere (Morgan 2009). Rather it is seen as permeating all strands of the programme, as emphasised in the multi-layered framework developed by

Shartrand et al. 1997). If carried out effectively, such an approach affords the opportunity for all the strands to be woven together, a feature of the 'exemplary teacher education programmes, identified by Darling-Hammond (2006), in order to provide trainee teachers with a richly textured understanding of the importance of FSP within pupil learning. If, however, the programme is not sufficiently well structured to enable these essential connections to be made, the risk is that FSP will be neglected. It is all too easy without a tightly integrated structure, for those delivering different elements to assume that FSP is being covered elsewhere in the ITE programme, with the risk that it may be reduced in importance or disappear completely. The alternative is what could be called a reductionist approach where the minimal requirements of the Teachers' Standards with regard to FSP are covered by a focus on what one of the respondents called 'dealing with parents', or where experiential learning is limited to attending (and perhaps contributing to) a parents' consultation meeting. The latter approach is of particular concern if, for example, such meetings are dominated by issues of academic progress and/or behaviour rather than allowing for a genuine dialogue as to how school and family might work together to support pupils. Moreover, in some cases, contact with parents is seen to be problematic in itself, with schools limiting contact in an attempt to protect their trainees.

The survey responses report that that in many cases FSP preparation is being dealt with as part of the wider provider-based professional studies programme, including case study approaches, a focus on communication with parents, school-based experiences and FSP-related aspects of other issues that are more explicitly addressed, such as: the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); the needs of those who have

English as an additional language (EAL); and the needs of those who are themselves carers or who are designated as 'looked after children'. Such provision reflects the findings of previous surveys elsewhere (see, for example, Hiatt-Michael 2001; Epstein 2001). Few of the programmes, however, would seem to go beyond a functional approach in order to focus on the specific approaches outlined by Shartrand et al. (1997), including an understanding of wider social and cultural factors around families and related issues of social capital. Such an approach might highlight for beginning teachers the need to understand more about the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg 1990) that exist within family and community and to recognise that households contain 'ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction' (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez 1992, 134).

Integrating knowledge and experience

While the data indicate that there is coverage of many FSP-related areas across providers, there is little sense in many of the responses of a single integrated programme that brings together the knowledge gained from what is delivered through taught sessions or academic study and what might be learnt during the practicum experience. Trainees clearly need opportunities both to develop the required professional knowledge around FSP but also to understand how that knowledge might be enacted in practice since professional knowledge has to be above all things knowledge for action; it is only in action that what trainee teachers have studied (or have been told) actually becomes meaningful and can be regarded as professional learning (Burn, Mutton, and Hagger 2015). Opportunities for such learning

tend to be limited either to the experience of attending a parents' consultation meeting where progress is reported to parents or carers by the teacher (or trainee teacher), or to discussions related to the support for children with special educational needs or related issues. In order to avoid such marginalisation it is necessary for an awareness of FSP issues to be incorporated fully into programme aims (vision) and subsequently treated in such a way as to integrate theoretical and practical considerations (coherence) alongside opportunities for direct experience, (enactment) (Hammerness and Klette 2015). The need for coherence, or programme integration, is particularly important when considering the attitudinal aspects of FSP: the development of the kind of dispositions needed to ensure that teachers are open to establishing and sustaining relationships with the parents/carers of those that they teach. For these dispositions to be secured, however, their development has to be accompanied by the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, which means identifying where within the whole ITE programme they will be modelled, analysed and practised. More effective integration might require not only the identification of where programme content could be delivered across teacher education partnerships that involve both providers and their partnership schools, but also discussion as to the agreed approaches that would be taken and how all of the learning might be drawn together in a coherent way. An inquiry-focussed project across a whole ITE partnership, reflecting the approach described by Allestaht-Snyder and Schwartz (2001), might be one way of providing the necessary framework both to integrate provision across different settings and to provide overall coherence.

Constraining factors

While there seems to be an overall willingness to extend current provision in respect of FSP within ITE programmes, the main barrier identified by the survey respondents is clearly the amount of time available to develop a meaningful understanding of FSP issues when so much else has to be covered. The introduction of prescribed 'core content' for ITE programmes in England has, if anything, reduced the likelihood of any increased FSP coverage within an already overcrowded curriculum. Where training related to FSP is included it is perhaps most likely to be focussed on the functional aspects of what trainee teachers are deemed to need and to be determined by the minimum requirements of the Teachers' Standards rather than by a wider vision of developing FSP in order to secure the potential benefits for pupil learning that are associated with increased parental involvement (Higgins and Katsipataki 2015; See and Gorard 2015). The dilemma, as expressed by many of the survey respondents, representing a range of different types of programme, is thus how to integrate the essential elements of a focus on FSP within an already crowded curriculum. Shartrand et al.'s (1995) model (identifying, as it does, seven key content areas and four approaches within each of these areas), and Epstein and Sanders (2006) 'theory of overlapping spheres of influence' (comprising both external and internal structures which determine the nature of communication and collaboration, as well as the interpersonal relationships required for effective FSP) alert us to the extent and the complexity of what needs to be learnt in terms of the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. If we accept that the period of initial teacher preparation (covering only 180 days for postgraduate programmes in England) can only feasibly establish the foundations for the development of such knowledge, skills and attitudes then it may be useful to draw on these frameworks to

help us to discern what these foundations might be. Since many of the respondents insisted that a focus on FSP was something that needed to extend beyond the period of initial training, that is to say into the NQT induction year and beyond, it would perhaps be most productive to focus attention on the need to determine what exactly should be established as the foundation, and what could subsequently be built upon such a foundation.

The lack of any real differences between HEI and SCITT providers is, perhaps, a little surprising, as one might have expected the drive towards more 'school-led' teacher education in England to have provided more scope for direct experience of working with parents in a range of different ways, especially where a priority of this school-led provision is to prepare teachers to be able to work effectively within the specific local context in which they are training. Nevertheless SCITT providers appear to be constrained equally by the need to cover so much else within the ITE curriculum. Overall the respondents indicated that a crowded curriculum was really the only barrier to including more FSP coverage within training programmes, irrespective of whether these were primary or secondary programmes or were led by an HEI or a SCITT. There was little reference to the broader range of barriers identified elsewhere in the literature (Shartrand et al. 1997; Epstein and Sanders 2006; Hornby and Lafaele 2011) that highlight national or state policy constraints, organisational issues or, in some cases, negative attitudes from teacher educators themselves. Given the stated willingness of the respondents to include more FSP provision in their programmes, the perceived overcrowding of the curriculum would appear to be the key factor but it might also be worth speculating as to whether the identification of

curriculum constraints actually masks some reluctance to engage with the breadth and complexity of the wider FSP issues themselves.

Conclusions

Two key insights emerge from the findings. First that there is a stated willingness among ITE providers of whatever type to do more to provide beginning teachers with the knowledge and experience they require in order for them to feel fully confident about their future professional work in relation to FSP. Second, in spite of this apparent willingness, there is a very strong perception among providers of all kinds that there is simply a lack of space within the current ITE curriculum that acts as a barrier to further development. Furthermore there appears to be little impetus for developing aspects of FSP provision within ITE without significant policy reform. While it would be easy to draw up a set of recommendations calling for policy change in relation to FSP, for example making a claim for it to be included in any future amendments to the core content of the ITE curriculum in England (DfE 2016a), this would not deal with the need to integrate different approaches into the programme. The question here is not what content should be included, but rather one of the pedagogy that is best suited to developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions of trainee teachers. Tensions between content prescription and pedagogical approaches are not unusual when attempts are made to address perceived problems in the ITE curriculum (Mutton, Burn, and Menter 2017). It could be argued that little will change in relation to FSP provision unless we address some important questions, particularly relating to when and how particular aspects of the curriculum are dealt with and, importantly, what might follow the period of initial

preparation. Faced with such questions there are likely to be two possible responses. The first is to recognise that all that is feasible, given the acknowledged constraints, is to include within training programmes some knowledge about FSP in relation to existing areas of the ITE curriculum (such as coverage of SEND; child development; or wider professional issues), while at the same time identifying opportunities to gain some practical skills during the school-based experience (such as reporting student progress to parents and carers). The second response is to recognise the importance of developing positive dispositions towards FSP during the training period – perhaps through adopting the inquiry-based approach recommended by Allesta-Snyder and Schwartz (2001) – and to acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of the issues (Shartrand et al. 1997), highlighting the wider social, cultural and attitudinal factors. Such an approach would enable trainee teachers to learn more about a range of issues such as the parents' views of school and home-school communication and the nature of the community within which the school is based. Central to both responses, however, are further questions as to what follows. If the focus in an ITE programme is on acquiring practical skills then what further professional learning needs to take place in the induction period and beyond in order to develop teachers' dispositions? If, however, the focus is on developing dispositions during the training period, what might schools need to do subsequently in order to develop the necessary practical skills? Although these questions relate specifically to FSP-related provision they do, in fact, lie at the heart of a wider debate, intensified by the rhetoric associated with the introduction of 'school-led' teacher training in England, as to how teachers' professional learning is conceptualised (Winch, Oancea, and Orchard 2014).

In England, given the requirements to deliver an ITE curriculum through a partnership between providers and schools and given that the practicum experience comprises at least two thirds of the training year, it could be argued that the necessary conditions are in place for teachers to be fully prepared in respect of FSP issues . Our research suggests, however, that is essentially unrealistic to expect newly qualified teachers with just a year's postgraduate training to be fully prepared. The implications of what we have learned are that all the members of any given partnership need to engage in more honest debate about what can realistically be learned within ITE – and how that can best be provided given the nature of the partnership. This means first working together to identify not merely the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they believe are necessary but also the kind of approach(es) to FSP that they regard as desirable. It also means an explicit acknowledgement (particularly by the schools that often go on to employ the trainees once they are qualified) of the question of how the foundations established during ITE phase can be built upon in the subsequent stages of professional learning.

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Table 1
Areas of content covered within current provision across providers

Area of focus	Specific content
General issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional behaviours. • understanding family. • transitions from home to school,
Communication issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicating with parents. • parent partnerships and relations with school; • Parents' Meetings; • maintaining good levels of communication with home.
Child-focused issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child development and the child in context • a study of the development of one child through a series of tasks and observations • working with parents in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); English as an Additional Language (EAL); • Experiences of working with Looked after Children • inclusion issues • barriers to learning
Wider issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diversity issues • a focus on Attachment Theory
Curriculum focussed issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting home-school links informed by a Home-School Knowledge exchange project. • focus on homework • school-based tasks that are carried out by trainees during school experience.

Table 2

Indication of current and potential future FSP provision in ITE programmes

	This topic does appear at present	This topic does not appear at present and I do not think that it should be added to the programme.	This topic does not appear at present but I think it should be added to the programme in future
The involvement of parents/carers with formal education in early years/primary.	10	3	4
Parental/carers' involvement in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)	12	1	4
Theoretical perspectives on partnerships between schools, families and the community	9	1	7
Research into partnerships between schools, families and the community	4	2	11
Practical elaboration of partnerships between school, family, and community, such as:	10	3	2
How to organise and conduct a parent-teacher meeting	12	0	5
How to organise and run a workshop for parents/carers	3	6	8
Producing a regular newsletter for parents/carers	4	6	6
Involving parents/carers and others from the local community in the school	6	2	9
Devising and setting homework in such a way that parents/carers can play an active role in supporting their children's learning	11	0	6
Collaborating with parents in a parent-school council	3	6	8
Coordinating resources from local businesses and the community to support pupils' learning	2	9	6
Collaborating with other agencies (e.g. social workers, the police, youth workers, medical professionals)	14	1	2
Statutory requirements in relation to the	12	1	3

involvement of parents/carers and parental involvement and partnerships between schools, families and the community			
Coordinating all forms of school/family communication to promote and sustain the involvement of parents/carers and partnerships between schools, families and the community?	5	6	6
Evaluating the practices and programmes of your school relating to parental/carer involvement and partnerships between schools, families and the community	6	6	5