

Teacher Education and Family-School Partnerships in different contexts: A cross country analysis of national teacher education frameworks across a range of European countries

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration with parents is widely regarded as important in the education of children and young people, yet teachers rarely feel sufficiently prepared for this task. Several studies indicate that initial teacher education (ITE) programmes struggle to address issues of family-school partnerships (FSP). Our purpose in this study was to assess whether national ITE frameworks in seven European countries enable or constrain effective FSP preparation for preservice teachers. Our data, drawn from document analysis and national surveys, suggests that, despite the importance officially attributed to FSP at both governmental and ITE institutional levels, no single country presents a satisfactory picture in terms of FSP provision within their ITE programmes or in the extent to which preservice teachers are prepared to deal with the issue. Regardless of the existence (or not) of a national curriculum and variations, both in terms of legally-required competences and the amount of attention given to FSP in ITE programmes, it appears that simply making FSP compulsory is not the solution. Nor do national frameworks, in themselves, really appear to shape and direct the provision offered. Essentially FSP preparation still seems to depend upon the proclivities and expertise of individual teacher educators.

1. Introduction

Liaising with families (or those acting as carers or guardians for young people, who should be seen as included within our use of the term 'families') is considered a key part of a teacher's work. The form of this communication ranges from sending reports and emails home, through personal phone calls to face-to-face meetings on scheduled occasions or as specific issues arise. Decades of research have shown that effective home-school relationships are important for students' well-being, academic achievement and socio-behavioural development (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Castro et al. 2015, Epstein, 2013; Jeynes 2007, Uludag 2008). In effective models of Family-School Partnerships (FSP), this work goes beyond the mere reporting of information to parents and includes forms of school and family collaborative partnerships (Epstein et al. 2002). Due to the proven contribution of partnerships to pupils' development and the important role of teachers in establishing these partnerships, some governments have mandated collaboration with parents as a required

competence for teachers (*inter alia*; Department for Education, 2010; European Commission 2013, Gartmeier, Gebhart and Dogter 2016 Willemse et al. 2016). While some governments, such as that in the United Kingdom, include a requirement within their standards for Qualified Teacher Status that teachers should ‘communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils’ achievements and well-being’ (DfE, 2011), others stipulate a more extensive commitment to collaborative working. In the USA, the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 requires school districts to involve parents and family members in their children’s education, while in Australia the teacher standards stipulate the need for partnership working (Saltmarsh et al. 2014).

Given the importance of FSP, it might be assumed that programmes of initial teacher education (ITE) would emphasise it within their programmes but research has shown that provision is often haphazard and inadequate (Epstein and Sanders 2006, Epstein, 2013; Evans 2013, Willemse et al. 2016). It is therefore not surprising that beginning teachers regard collaborating with parents as one of the major challenges that they face; and one for which they do not feel adequately prepared (Gaikhorst 2014; Ingvarson, Beavis, and Kleinhenz 2007, Saltmarsh et al. 2014). While the general picture is one of inadequate provision, Epstein and Sanders (2006) found, in a study of FSP provision in 161 schools, colleges, and departments of education in the United States, that positive attitudes towards FSP from course leaders had a significant effect on both the quality of course content and the extent to which the new teachers felt adequately prepared for this aspect of their role. Nevertheless Willemse et al. (2016) have shown not only that preparing preservice teachers for FSP remains a challenge in some European countries, but that in others no research has even been conducted to establish how, or how effectively, ITE programmes are preparing preservice teachers for FSP.

This article examines some of the similarities and differences across a number of European countries in the contexts in which ITE programmes seek to prepare preservice teachers for FSP in order to determine whether and how ITE national frameworks facilitate or constrain such preparation. It draws on national accounts of the provision of schooling and ITE in each country as well as on descriptive accounts of teacher education practices in those contexts. These accounts were produced by members of an international group of researchers and analysed in relation to one another to identify key areas of commonality and difference and their possible implications for the development of work on FSP in teacher education programmes. It is worth emphasising that six of the seven countries included within this comparative exercise have national policies that give explicit attention to FSP within the teacher standards or competencies on which the award of qualified teacher status is based. The individual national studies on which this comparison is based are

presented in more detail elsewhere in this Special Issue but here we focus on some of the key emerging themes.

2. Review of the Literature

Whilst there is general agreement in the international literature that positive family involvement in schools can be associated with improved student performance (e.g. Barnard 2004; Fan and Chen 2011; Jeynes 2005; Torpor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins 2010) and motivation (e.g. Gonzalez-De Hass, Willems, and Holbein 2005) as well as with social and emotional well-being (e.g. Christenson and Havy 2004; Emerson, Fear, Fox, and Holbein 2012), working with parents and families is both complex (e.g. de Bruïne et al. 2014; Epstein 2011) and highly contextualised (e.g. Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Hornby and Lafaele 2011) since it involves, for example, an understanding of the particular circumstances of a range of individual students and their families.

One indication of this complexity can be found in the many terms that have been used to refer to the relationship between schools, teachers and parents; terms that range from parental 'involvement' in their child's education at home or at school, to 'collaboration' with parents and to more developed 'partnerships' (for a more extended description of this variation see Epstein 2011). These various terms encompass the diverse ways in which parents and teachers might be involved in students' academic and social development during their school career, from parenting or learning at home to volunteering at school, or shared decision-making. However some definitions imply a one-way direction, with teachers assuming that it is the parent who needs to become involved instead of anticipating an equal and reciprocal relationship (Evans and Radina 2014). Barriers to effective FSP include negative cultural factors or attitudes in some schools and some teachers' lack of awareness of the importance of the issue. As Weiss, Lopez and Rosenberg (2010) and Kroeger and Lash (2011) have pointed out, the great diversity of young people in today's European classrooms, coming from a range of socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, means that teachers seeking to engage effectively with their families (and of course, with the students themselves) need to be aware of a great many different social, economic and cultural factors.

Many parents are very willing to be involved in their children's education and to engage with schools for a variety of reasons. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) found, those who do get involved tend to do so because they see such participation as a natural part of their role as parents and believe that they are able to help their children succeed in school; they see possibilities for FSP involvement and have received an invitation or clear encouragement from the school and teachers

to establish partnerships. However, the ways in which teachers invite parents to become partners in supporting their children's learning and development are particularly important and can prove highly problematic. Kroeger and Lash (2011, 270) argue that parents are often placed in a position where they are expected to 'listen to the authority' of teachers', which means that the collaboration is far from being an equal and reciprocal partnership. The risk of this happening is all the more pronounced if initial teacher education (ITE) programmes frame the issue of effective FSP in negative terms, focusing on topics such as working with "difficult parents" rather than adopting more open and nuanced language to explore ways of working productively together and developing the necessary skills and cultural knowledge to do so (Hornby and Lafaele 2011, Willemse et al. 2016).

"Hard to reach" parents is another unhelpful label that may encourage preservice teachers to regard certain students' families as a "problem" rather than helping beginners to recognise the ways in which schools and teachers can actually present barriers to effective engagement, even by the most willing parents. There are clear messages from research about the need to engage parents from lower income families (Connell and Prinz 2006; Desfourges and Abouchaar 2002) and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (e.g. Columbo 2006; Crawford and Zygourias-Coe 2006). Lusse (2013) found, for example, that working with such families in secondary schools can have very positive outcomes – building worthwhile partnerships in 90% of the sample cases – although the nature of those partnerships is likely to vary according to the ages of the students involved (Desforages and Abouchar, 2003; Epstein 2011). It is apparent, however, that much educational discourse about the under-achievement of disadvantaged students tends to attribute blame to a lack of parental aspirations, perpetuating a deficit model in which the under-achievement of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is attributed to perceived problems located within the pupils, their parents and communities (e.g. Gorski 2012). Cummings et al. (2012) have demonstrated that families from working class and lower income backgrounds are often actually highly aspirational for their children but may lack the confidence or opportunity to interact with those who teach them. As Lareau (2011) has demonstrated, many aspirational working class families are content to leave schooling to the professionals, whereas middle class families tend to have much more direct involvement in their children's schooling. New teachers need the cultural resources that will help them both to understand this apparently detached outlook and its implications and to find ways of reassuring parents about the on-going importance of their contributions to their child's learning. This illustrates the importance of teachers knowing how to set up these relationships, taking into account the fact – as Desforages and Abouchaar (2003) and Epstein (2011) have long argued – that the character of this partnership changes depending on the age of the pupils.

In sum, establishing partnerships with families is an important but complex challenge to which preservice teachers need to be carefully introduced. By its very nature, the question of partnership between families and schools can only be explored by such teachers in the context of their particular placement schools, but there is a risk in leaving this element of their professional learning to the school-based teacher educators (i.e. to mentors) that unhelpful stereotypes and untested assumptions will tend to prevail. We have clear evidence that, if left unchallenged, preservice teachers' existing views on FSP will tend to dominate their thinking (Graue and Brown 2003). In a mixed methods study, by D'Haem and Griswold (2017), for example, it was observed that even though their university-based teacher educators expressed strong social justice views about engaging with parents, many preservice teachers attributed student problems to perceived parental failings. Accordingly they concentrated on giving out information to parents (one-way communication) rather than building reciprocal partnerships. Other research has found that within schools, many pre-service teachers are regularly exposed to mixed messages or contradictory advice (de Bruïne et al. 2014, Evans 2013).

An additional challenge is the difference between preservice teachers' views at primary and at secondary level. In a previous study, we found that those training to teach in secondary education often hold the view that collaboration with parents is an appropriate objective only for those working in primary education. They did not consider FSP as important in relation to their future professional roles (Willemse et al. 2017). Graue and Brown (2003) emphasized that the characteristics of preservice teachers' background (single, white, middle class and often female) and their conceptual models of good teachers, as well as the way in which they understand the nature of professionalism all have an influence on their conception of FSP and its place within their vision of themselves as teachers.

Unfortunately when the dominance of deficit ideologies (Gorski 2012) that blame parents is acknowledged and considered in light of research evidence that preservice teachers' views are notoriously hard to change (e.g. Ellis, Thompson, McNicholl and Thomson 2016; Thompson, McNicholl and Menter 2016), the critical importance of ITE engagement in FSP becomes all the more apparent (see, for example, Epstein and Sanders 2006; Epstein 2013; Evans 2013; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez 1997; Willemse et al. 2016; Willemse et al. 2017). The consistency of these research findings has prompted Epstein (2005) to call for a well-planned series of professional

development opportunities focused on FSP that begins with ITE and extends through induction as a newly qualified teacher and beyond.

It is important to note, however, that many of these studies were conducted in North America (e.g. Epstein 2005) or Australasia (e.g. Saltmarsh, Barr, and Chapman 2014). Despite there being more research in these contexts, the evidence is that things have not necessarily improved. Indeed recent research (Willemse et al. 2016) suggests that little has changed since Epstein and Sanders' (2006) ground-breaking study in the United States which pointed out that although leaders of ITE programmes understood the importance of FSP, few believed their programmes were addressing the issue adequately. Across Europe, there is less knowledge about the ways in which ITE programmes address FSP, but what evidence exists is not encouraging. Dusi (2012) in a review of the research literature found that in countries as diverse as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the Czech Republic, the issue of family-school relationships was seen as unresolved and unsatisfactory and needed further attention at both the school level and in ITE.

Despite the fact that in some European countries (e.g. the Netherlands and Belgium) engagement with parents is a legally required competence for teachers, research suggests that little attention is paid to FSP within ITE programmes which mainly offer a single course on 'communication' or 'working with difficult parents'. It is therefore unsurprising that preservice teachers feel unprepared to establish more genuine partnerships and express the need for more attention to be paid to this topic along with more opportunities actually to practise working with parents. Indeed, in some programmes in these countries preparation for developing FSP was either not included in the curriculum or seemed to depend entirely on the concepts and teaching practices of individual teacher educators (e.g. de Bruïne et al.; Willemse et al. 2014; Willemse et al. 2016). Around a third of course leaders actually felt that preparing teachers for FSP was not really their responsibility; it was best done within in-service training once beginners had joined the profession. These views were strengthened by the fact that ITE curricula were regarded as overloaded and this dimension of practice seemed to be one that would fit better within in-service training, when teachers had the opportunity actually to develop such relationships. This tendency to delay consideration of FSP is perhaps indicative of a lack of theorisation within some ITE programmes about this complex issue, which tended to be seen as an essentially practical issue. This suggestion is reinforced by the findings of a European Commission (2013) survey of 26 European countries, which emphasised as a first priority, the need to define clearly what those responsible for teacher education should be expected to know, and be able to do. The same report also highlighted the importance of promoting regular

dialogue among key stakeholders so that teacher educators could feed into national policy-making and called for the development of a shared vision, with a common understanding of 'quality' in teacher education. The report's recommendations reflect a concern that leaving the development of legally-required teacher competences in relation to FSP in the hands of individual teacher educators would do little to improve the quality of preservice provision.

In summary, the body of existing literature suggests that FSP is an important issue for preservice teachers. Although only a few studies of ITE provision for FSP have been conducted in Europe, this research reveals that ITE providers recognise the importance of this issue, but often fail to deal adequately with it. Seeking to address these failings is, however, likely to present significant challenges given the issue of already over-loaded ITE programmes.

3. Methods

Given the lack of knowledge about how preservice teachers across Europe are prepared for FSP in ITE programmes, the purpose of the current research was to assess whether and how particular national ITE frameworks enable or constrain such preparation. Teacher education researchers from Belgium (Flanders), England, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland joined in a collaborative group to compare and contrast the current state of preparation for FSP within their national contexts. The composition of this group was in effect a convenience sample since researchers from a range of other European countries were also invited but found themselves unable to participate in the research. Despite this limitation, the research group represented a relatively large gathering of experienced teacher educators from diverse European countries. The research design used a mixed methods approach, drawing on the expert knowledge of the teacher educators involved in the research team to map out broad patterns of provision before conducting a series of national surveys to develop a more detailed picture of the patterns of practice across different kinds of teacher education programmes.

1) Preliminary analysis of national educational systems and policies

The first step was to conduct a preliminary analysis of the current state of compulsory schooling and ITE provision in each country before examining the specific provision made within ITE programmes to prepare preservice teachers for FSP. A common template was developed to frame descriptive

accounts of the provision within individual countries, each drafted by the researchers from the country concerned. This made it possible to discern similarities and differences in the way in which FSP was approached that could be analysed with reference to each specific national context. Representatives of each participating country were asked to provide a short description of the structures of compulsory schooling and of ITE, an outline of national and/or regional policies on teacher education and any specific government requirements or guidelines in terms of approaches to FSP within ITE programmes. During a two-day meeting the researchers discussed these individual country descriptions, drawing out the similarities and differences. This analysis provided a lens through which we could interpret the outcomes of the second step, a series of national surveys (and/or documentary analysis, as explained below) of FSP provision within ITE programmes, conducted in the researchers' respective European countries.

2) National surveys

A series of national surveys – in England, Spain and Switzerland, Finland, and Norway – were conducted based on the methods employed in a joint research project on FSP that had already been carried out by team members in Belgium and the Netherlands (Willemse et al. 2016). This in turn had been based on a modified version of the Epstein and Sanders (2006) survey tool. (For an extended description of the original survey tools see Epstein and Sanders 2016, Willemse et al. 2016). The main topics addressed by the questions were:

- (i) the opinion of course leaders about the importance of preparing preservice teachers for FSP;
- (ii) the coverage of FSP in the curricula of the ITE programmes (how it is offered);
- (iii) course leaders' perceptions of preservice teachers' preparedness for FSP; and
- (iv) any intentions they had to develop the preparation of preservice teachers for FSP.

Our aim was to develop a fuller understanding of whether and how preparation for FSP is addressed within ITE programmes and the extent to which this preparation is regarded as sufficient. Each researcher in this collaborative group attempted to use the existing surveys as point of departure and adapted them to their own national context. In the Spanish context, for example, the researchers decided to develop two separate surveys, one for ITE in relation to primary education and the other for ITE programmes training teachers at secondary level. However, a low response rate overall and inconsistencies in appropriate knowledge from those who completed the surveys meant that the researchers relied instead on course curriculum documentary analysis. The Swiss researcher adapted the survey to focus only on the German-speaking part of Switzerland; while a

Norwegian researcher, faced with a very low response rate, chose instead to conduct a documentary analysis in light of there being a national ITE curriculum. While it was important to allow individual adaptations of the survey in order to accommodate significant national differences, our essential aim remained the collection of relevant data in as consistent a manner as possible, allowing us to examine the relative importance attached to it in each context. However, the differences in the data sources mean that we are not attempting a full comparative analysis in this article but rather to highlight the relative importance placed on FSP within national ITE contexts based on available data sources. Table 1 summarises the data sources from the seven contexts.

Table 1. Data sources from the seven research projects.

	Data Sources
Belgium – Flanders	33 survey responses from 56 Teacher Education Institutions (19 primary, 10 secondary education lower grades, 4 secondary education higher grades).
England	22 survey responses were received from the national survey; 15 from Higher Education Institutions (HEI) providers and seven from School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers.
Finland	7 survey responses from 8 teacher education institutions in research universities.
The Netherlands	19 survey responses from 56 Teacher Education Institutions (10 primary, 4 secondary education lower grades, 5 secondary education higher grades).
Norway	Documentary analysis of documents describing the national policies for teacher education, local programme plans for teacher education and course plans for compulsory courses in teacher education.
Spain	Documentary analysis of curriculum plans of 17 BA of teacher of education programmes (primary) and MA of teacher of education programmes (secondary).
Switzerland	9 survey responses from 11 Schools of Teacher Education in the German speaking part of Switzerland.

The transcript of the two-day meeting, the individual country case descriptions and the outcomes of the national surveys were used to address the following research question:

What is the impact of ITE frameworks on FSP preparation for preservice teachers?

In response to this question, we provide a brief overview of the five individual projects in relation to the changing landscape of ITE provision and the nature of FSP.

4. Findings

4.1 National Differences in ITE Provision

In order to understand the contexts of FSP provision in these European countries it is first necessary to examine the respective policy pressures on the direction of ITE provision. Table 2 therefore outlines the pattern of ITE provision in each of the seven countries and highlights the most important recent or current reforms that have had an impact upon it.

This comparison reveals that the preparation of prospective teachers is conducted in many different ways. The length of ITE programmes that recruit undergraduates varies, for example, from three to five years, and in some cases such programmes also include study at the Master's level. Shorter, postgraduate-only, routes may also be offered, again with Master's level credits included (although they are not always required). There does, however, appear to be a general move across the countries towards awarding teacher qualifications at Master's level, particularly for those preparing to teach at secondary school level. Certainly most countries report that ITE provision for those intending to teach at the upper levels of secondary education is at postgraduate level. Finland, Switzerland and Norway all offer five-year Master's level courses for primary and secondary teachers, although Finland is unique in the high status of its primary ITE with only 10% of applicants securing a place. In most countries primary courses are more likely to be offered at Bachelor's level.

The extent of government prescription also varies. In six countries teacher standards or competencies are set out by the government, and most have a national agency that assesses the quality of ITE programmes. Two countries go further with a more or less prescribed curriculum for ITE. Important differences exist in relation to the nature of the competencies expected and the way in which they are expressed. While the Swiss government, for example, emphasizes the responsibility of schools to inform parents about their children's progress, the Dutch government emphasizes the need for collaboration with parents.

Table 2 National education systems: ITE provision and recent reforms

	ITE Provision	Characteristics of ITE	Governmental policies on FSP in ITE	Recent or current reforms
Belgium – Flanders	<p>Primary: Professional Bachelor's (180 credits) for nursery, primary or '1st stage' secondary lower grades (3 years). Also a 60-credit PG qualification for those with a subject diploma at Bachelor's level (30 credits for the practicum) (1 year)</p> <p>Secondary: As above.</p> <p>For those training to teach the upper secondary grades a 60 credit 'specific education programme' at Master's level (to be undertaken after a subject master).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national curriculum The quality of the ITE programmes is monitored by the Dutch-Flemish governmental organisation responsible for accreditation of higher education (NVAO). 	No formal policies other than that the teacher competencies identified by the government include the need for collaboration with parents in pre-school, primary and secondary education.	At secondary level students can now only select two subjects in which to train to teach, whereas previously they could choose three.
England	<p>Primary: Bachelor level with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (3 or 4 years), often with lower entry requirements than for other degree subjects) <i>or</i> 1-year postgraduate programme with 60 Master's level credits.</p> <p>Secondary: Predominantly 1 year postgraduate programme with Master's level credits.</p> <p>Some school-based courses leading to QTS only.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national curriculum, although there is a set of requirements detailed by the government (through the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). All 1-year postgraduate teacher education programmes have been required to operate as 'partnerships' since 1992/93 with at least two-thirds of preservice teachers' time spent in school. Standards and quality are monitored by the government inspection service, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 	No explicit policy beyond the fact that Teacher Standard 8 (Wider professional responsibilities) sets out the requirement to 'communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being'.	<p>2010: the introduction of 'school-led' ITE, which expanded rapidly. Just over 50% of training places are now allocated directly to schools who choose university partners or operate alone as School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITTs).</p> <p>2010: revision of the standards for QTS.</p> <p>2016: Non-statutory recommendations for the core content of ITE programmes published by an 'expert group', following the report of the Carter Review (2015), but this content essentially echoes the standards for QTS.</p>
Finland	<p>Primary: School of ITE offers 'competence-based' teacher education. Master's level (5 years) Only 10% of applicants get a place.</p> <p>Secondary: 2 routes:</p> <p>i) Preliminary subject studies for several years, then 'subject teacher education', <i>or</i></p> <p>ii) Concurrent subject and teacher education studies. (5 years)</p> <p>Both routes lead to qualification at Master's level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national curriculum Teacher education programs in Finland are monitored by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) Universities are also themselves responsible for the evaluation of their own operations and outcomes Ministry of Education and Culture monitors teachers' formal qualifications 	<p>Since the Basic Education Act of 1998 FSP has been mandatory in ITE programmes.</p> <p>The Finnish National Board of Education sets out the National Core Curriculum for grades 1-9, in which it is stated that schools have to co-operate with homes.</p>	<p>2005: changes in programme structure and qualification levels, initiated by the Bologna process.</p> <p>2014: A new core curriculum for basic education was introduced.</p>

The Netherlands	<p>Primary: Bachelor level (PABO) at University of Applied Sciences (UAS) (4 years) or Bachelor's level 'Academische' PABO in UAS and research universities.</p> <p>Secondary: Lower secondary Bachelor's at UAS for teaching the first 3 years of higher secondary education & all years of (pre-)vocational education (4 years Bachelor) Or full qualification at research university or UAS for all secondary level teachers (1-year Master's programme).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national curriculum. The quality of the ITE programmes are monitored by the Dutch-Flemish governmental organization responsible for accreditation of higher education (NVAO). 	<p>The teacher competencies identified by the government include collaboration with parents in pre-school, primary and secondary education.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education designated the year 2012 as a year of collaboration between parents and schools.</p>	<p>Introduction of selection instruments for ITE (maths and languages).</p> <p>Introduction of joint primary degree: 4 year teaching degree with general education degree (Bachelor's level at research university).</p> <p>Introduction of school-based teacher education: 40% in school.</p> <p>Introduction of Dutch professional standards for teacher educators.</p> <p>Introduction of practice-based research in ITE programmes.</p>
Norway	<p>Primary: General teacher education (4 years) or subject teacher education (3 or 4 years).</p> <p>Secondary: General teacher education for teaching at lower secondary or subject teacher education (3 or 4 years) for those training to teach subjects at lower or upper secondary level. A 3-year vocational teacher programme and a 5-year integrated Master's are also offered.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national curriculum. Pursuant to current legislation, the Ministry lays down national curriculum regulations for individual courses, including teacher education. On the basis of these regulations, individual institutions develop curricula for compulsory and elective course modules. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for the quality of higher education, including ITE courses. 	<p>Parents' formal rights have been extended in Norway, and are articulated in the Education Act and in the national curriculum for primary and secondary education.</p>	<p>2006: Knowledge Promotion Reform (KPR), dealing with primary, lower and upper secondary education and training. Increased focus on basic skills and knowledge promotion through outcomes-based learning.</p>
Spain	<p>Primary: 4-year Bachelor's degree (240 credits) at private or public universities.</p> <p>Secondary: 1-year postgraduate programme with 60 Master's level credits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a more or less prescribed structure for the curriculum, based on teacher competencies provided by the government for both primary and secondary ITE. A national institution of evaluation (ANECA) is responsible for the quality of ITE. 	<p>One of the subjects within the curriculum identified by the government is 'society, family and education'.</p> <p>ANECA prescribes some specific competences for pre-school education to concerned with creating and maintain relationships with families. One such competency is also prescribed for primary education.</p>	<p>2009: Reforms prompted by the Bologna process were implemented, resulting in the current 4-year BA degrees.</p> <p>Specification of the content, 'know-how' and professional attitudes to be developed, expressed in terms of competencies.</p> <p>Increased time was allocated to practice – which now accounts for 60 credits (within 240).</p>
Switzerland	<p>Primary: 3-year Bachelor's degree. Pädagogische Hochschulen (University Schools of Teacher Education or STEs) provide end-to-end teacher education at all levels from Kindergarten to primary</p> <p>Lower secondary: 5-year Master's degree</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national curriculum, although ITE is regulated. A committee of experts reviews the regulations and checks ITE curricula. The findings of the review are not made public. 	<p>One ITE regulation emphasizes that teachers should have the competence to cooperate with parents.</p> <p>Legislation for primary and secondary education emphasises</p>	<p>Major reforms (1998- 2003) replaced 96 teacher training colleges with 19 University Schools of Teacher Education. National Diplomas (as defined in the Bologna System).</p> <p>Quality management requires recognition</p>

	<p>at University plus 1-year at Pädagogische Hochschule.</p> <p>Upper secondary: 5-year Master's degree at University plus 1-year at Pädagogische Hochschule.</p>		<p>that the main activity for teachers in relation to parents is to inform them in parental meetings about the educational goals of the school and about the academic performance of the student.</p>	<p>every 5 years.</p> <p>2014: Assessment for Career changers - reduced study time.</p> <p>2015: (Pilot) Assessment for all students.</p> <p>2015 Partnerships (being piloted) with selected schools for both research and training the students.</p>
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The Bologna Process outlining three tiers of higher-education qualifications (normally equivalent to Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees) was cited as a significant driver for change in at least three of the countries (Finland, Spain and Switzerland). There was also a move towards more specialisation in subjects and an increased focus on both standards and skills. In reflecting on the influences on their national provision, the researchers also suggested that an increased government focus on PISA results as well changes in patterns and types of employment were also fuelling discussions about the kind of preparation that was needed within ITE.

An important influence in some contexts, such as England and the Netherlands, was an increased focus on school-based teacher education, which in some cases extended well beyond a concern with the nature of the 'practicum' experience to consideration of schools' roles in co-planning or even leading the ITE curriculum. England was experiencing the most radical change, particularly with the introduction and proliferation of 'school-led' provision, which could in *some* School-Centred Initial Teacher Training programmes mean the exclusion of higher education altogether from ITE. (In most cases, however, it represents a shift in power – reflected in the allocation of funding – within existing school-university partnerships). Although the structures elsewhere are quite different, there is generally an increased emphasis on professional standards and on school-based learning that Mattson, Vidar Eilertsen, and Rorrison (2011) describe as a 'practicum turn'.

National accountability systems have become increasingly prevalent, largely operating through inspection regimes and there is a strong focus on expected outcomes both for ITE programmes and for individual preservice teachers. As noted above, teaching is increasingly seen as a potentially Master's-level profession, which is reflected in more Master's credits and an increased number of ITE courses that award a full Master's degree. Finland still stands out, however, as an exception to the narrative of *change*, perhaps because of the strength of its *existing* Master's-level ITE provision, the strong state funding allocated to ITE, and the continued high status of teaching as a profession. Entrance into ITE programmes in Finland remains highly competitive, particularly in the primary school sector, whereas other countries are reporting a recruitment crisis.

The scale and scope of current reforms in ITE in the majority of these countries and the general move towards more school-led provision would suggest that the content of ITE programmes might be subject to revision, which at least provides scope for greater attention to be given to the topic of FSP. The findings from each project reported in the next section, shed light on the ways that FSP is both perceived and delivered within ITE programmes.

4.2 Individual Projects

Belgium and the Netherlands

This was the first research project conducted by author and colleagues (Willemse et al. 2016) which inspired the wider European collaboration. The main findings are briefly recapped here to provide a basis for a comparison with the other studies. Preparing preservice teachers for FSP was generally regarded as important according to the programme managers of the participating Dutch and Flemish teacher education institutes. In most programmes, FSP is integrated within other, more general, courses. In two Dutch master's programmes, however, no attention at all is given to FSP and not every programme manager shared the opinion that preparation for FSP should be required for certification or graduation. Only half of the programme managers of Bachelor programmes considered FSP preparation as at least a 'somewhat important' requirement for graduation and none of the programme managers of the Master's programmes found it 'important' for graduation. Moreover, one-third of the programme managers held the opinion that preparation for FSP belongs to in-service rather than pre-service training. In addition two-thirds of the programme managers of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes for secondary education believed that school leaders in secondary education might be indifferent about whether the teachers they hire are competent to establish partnerships with parents. Where attention was paid to FSP, it was focused on topics such as parent-teacher conferences or theoretical understandings of the nature and importance of FSP. These theories were included in most of the ITE curricula, except for the Dutch secondary education curriculum (at Bachelor and Master's level). More complex topics like planning, implementing and evaluating coherent (school-wide) programmes for FSP were lacking in most ITE curricula. A majority of the participating programme managers felt that the preparation of their pre-service teachers in relation to FSP was not adequate and believed that students graduating from their courses would not feel prepared to establish FSP. Indeed a majority of the respondents claimed that they wanted to change their curricula to improve the preparation of preservice teachers for FSP, especially by offering more field experiences that included engagement with parents. Yet they also pointed out the difficulties of doing so, emphasising the fact their ITE programmes were already overloaded.

England

The English survey was intended to include both traditional university-school partnership programmes and schemes that had been more recently established as school-led programmes. In both sectors there was a general perception that more needed to be done in the area of FSP. Those

respondents who felt most positive about their provision claimed that they tended to integrate FSP across their curriculum. However, many of the ITE programme providers adopted a limited, essentially functional approach by tackling specific topics in an isolated fashion (in 'one-off' sessions) and few examined wider social and cultural factors around families and schooling or related issues concerning social capital. Although most respondents expressed a willingness to extend and develop FSP, provision constraining factors such as time and already overloaded curricula were viewed as barriers to this development. These responses highlighted a discrepancy between the perceived need for preservice teachers to gain more knowledge and experience of FSP and a lack of opportunity or requirement for this to be developed within ITE programmes. Even though preservice teachers spent more time in schools than most of their European counterparts (120 days minimum in a one-year course), their school-based learning was often entirely context-specific, with little emphasis on the general principles that could be explored and examined through the lens of particular practices. Lack of proper integration of FSP between the university and school parts of some programmes appeared to result in a missed opportunity.

Finland

In Finland, professional preparation in relation to FSP is required by law for primary and secondary teachers. Despite this legislative framework, individual programmes are allowed a high degree of autonomy in determining how they will include such preparation within their programmes. Surveys were sent to all seven ITE institutions in Finland with the aim of assessing FSP provision in early childhood, primary, and secondary teacher education. Responses indicate that FSP was seen by all respondents as an integral part of ITE. Modules under the general heading of 'educational cooperation' were compulsory across all the institutions. In relation to all three sectors of education (pre-school, primary and secondary), the issue of FSP was discussed in several modules within the ITE programme and it was also seen as a key part of the in-school practicum. However, there was some variation in respondents' views about the adequacy of provision within the different sectors. Early childhood education respondents were confident that there was sufficient coverage of FSP in their programmes, whereas both primary and secondary sector respondents suggested that they thought that more needed to be done. Although the coverage was more extensive than in most countries in our project, programme directors pointed to national survey data within Finland, which suggested that teachers did not feel well prepared for FSP by their ITE programmes and expressed their surprise about this finding.

Norway

Due to a low response to the initial survey about FSP, which may in itself suggest a lack of strong interest in the issue, the methods of the Norwegian project were significantly amended. The study consisted of documentary analysis of: national policies relating to FSP in ITE in Norway; the course plans of ITE programmes; and the content of individual compulsory modules. This analysis revealed an overall lack of specific focus on topics related to FSP, despite the high importance put on parental involvement in schools by the Norwegian government. Examination of recent research conducted in Norway in fact suggests that the reality of preservice teacher preparation for parental involvement has been rather different from the legal requirements, with teachers feeling ill-prepared to work with families. Indeed, and that dealing with critical parents was one of the key factors causing teachers to feel stressed. The study highlighted the paradox that despite research evidence of the positive effect of FSP the issue was largely ignored in ITE programmes. Unsurprisingly, the researchers concluded that much more needed to be done to address FSP within ITE.

Spain

The Spanish researchers initially tried to survey teacher educators using the Epstein and Sanders (2006) instrument in order to gauge the amount of FSP guidance offered to preservice teachers. However, the response from universities was poor overall and some ITE programme managers reported that they did not have the information available. Again the low response rate and difficulties in answering the questions can be seen as interesting data in itself in that it suggests that the issue is either not seen as important or is too poorly understood. Another reason for the limited response may be the complexity of the issue. The research design was switched to a documentary analysis of primary and secondary ITE programmes in 17 institutions across Spain. Although this revealed that all the institutions addressed the issue of FSP, very few did so in a satisfactory way. Competences regarding working with families were often made explicit within the curriculum programmes, reflecting government requirement. However, these competences were often not articulated into specific objectives and the curriculum content associated with them was often vague. Perhaps most tellingly, only 3 of the 17 programmes referred in their documentation to collaborative work between families and teachers in schools. Within most programmes, the emphasis was on imparting information.

Switzerland

The project in Switzerland concentrated on FSP provision in primary school level programmes. Research was conducted using a modified version of the FSP questionnaire developed by Epstein and Sanders (2006) and Willemse et al. (2016), documentary analysis, and in-depth interviews with

four lecturers in one school of teacher education. All eleven schools of teacher education in the German part of Switzerland were surveyed. The results showed that all of the programme leaders thought that FSP was an important issue both at the higher education institution and during placement training. All programmes had some FSP provision. Some included specialised courses and all had at least two courses related to FSP. However, the quality of this provision was heavily dependent on the views and knowledge of the teacher educators delivering the courses. None of the programme leaders who responded felt that their preservice teachers were very well prepared for FSP, but they did not see the potential for extending or improving provision due to overloaded programmes.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In addressing our research question on the impact of ITE frameworks on effective FSP preparation for preservice teachers we have looked at: the structures of ITE provision; recent national reforms to ITE ; and research projects related to FSP conducted in the seven national contexts within our study. Although there were some differences in the findings from the six research projects, there were also some common threads across the different contexts. In all countries FSP was regarded as an important issue at both governmental and ITE institutional levels. Yet none of the research teams reported a satisfactory picture of FSP provision within ITE or in the preparedness of preservice teachers to deal with the variety of complex social and cultural issues involved. The picture was very similar, regardless of particular teacher standards or competencies related to FSP, specified by national governments and thus framing the requirements of ITE programmes, and regardless of the existence of national agencies to assess the quality of such programmes. Moreover, irrespective of whether there was a national curriculum for ITE (as in Spain) or not (as in the Netherlands), and irrespective of the duration of particular programmes, or variations in the amount of attention given to FSP within them, it was true in all countries that:

- a) Preparing preservice teachers for FSP is not sufficiently well developed;
- b) FSP preparation seems to depend upon the proclivities and expertise of individual teacher educators;
- c) According to teacher educators the lack of attention to FSP is attributed to pressures of time and other curriculum content requirements;
- d) Increasing the amount of time spent by preservice teachers in schools does not necessarily guarantee higher quality preparation for FSP.

Given the importance of effective preparation for FSP reported in the literature, the lack of attention that we found being paid to this issue in ITE frameworks is undoubtedly problematic and reflects the findings of former studies on this topic (de Bruïne et al. 2014; Epstein and Sanders 2006, Evans 2013). With FSP provision marginalised in many programmes or left largely to schools to address, there is an urgent need to acknowledge both the importance and the complexity of the issue. Relying on individual schools to provide appropriate experience and development in relation to FSP runs the risk of a lack of theorisation about the issue, making it less likely that preservice teachers will develop a sustainable approach that can be effectively transferred and adapted to different and potentially diverse contexts. As with any element of an ITE programme in such circumstances, the quality of FSP preparation will depend essentially on the specific views and understanding of teachers within that particular school as well as on the school's cultural openness to developing effective FSP. Obviously preservice teachers can only gain essential experience of building FSP partnerships in the course of their particular school-based placements, but they also need to be given carefully structured opportunities to examine not just the ways in which those particular partnerships have been built and how they operate, but also to think critically about their effectiveness, about the kinds of knowledge and assumptions on which their operation rests and about how that operation might be similar or different in other kinds of context.

Simply making FSP compulsory, which might be assumed to enhance its position within the ITE curriculum, does not seem to be the solution. The prescriptions of the Spanish government were, for example, adapted by ITE providers to generate very vague curriculum objectives. In Finland, where the development of FSP is compulsory for teachers in primary and secondary education and where provision was seen to be relatively strong in terms of the curriculum programme content for ITE in all sectors, preservice teachers still did not claim that they felt well prepared to cultivate such partnerships. On the other hand, none of the projects suggested that their national frameworks in themselves constrained their provision. Rather, it was issues of time, the already overloaded programmes and the relative importance given to other aspects of curriculum provision that limited the extent to which FSP was well delivered. Indeed, the fact that some individual teacher educators who responded to the survey actually placed a very high priority on FSP and, in some cases, were relatively successful in meeting their objectives suggests that the national frameworks neither constrained nor enabled FSP provision. However, it could be argued that the mandatory coverage of other issues did in effect constrain FSP provision and lead to an uneven reliance on school input. The very fact that the partnerships implied by reference to 'FSP' depends on the quality of relationships that teachers establish, there are good grounds for suggesting that much of beginning teachers'

learning about FSP can only take place once they are actually embedded within a school and the community which it serves, and thus should be left to in-service professional development. The importance of the issue, however, is such that attention needs to be paid at least to establishing secure foundations for future learning (Epstein, 2005), which requires more, rather than less theorisation and a much less haphazard approach than that identified by Epstein(2013) and in the findings reported here.

Of course an intense focus on one aspect of ITE provision may have the effect of highlighting weaknesses rather than strengths and we can only conjecture whether other aspects of ITE provision might also be deemed insufficient. Nevertheless there is clearly a need to focus more on teacher education and teacher educators in order to guarantee providing 'new teachers with initial teacher education of the highest quality, and encouraging serving teachers to continue developing and extending their competences throughout their careers' both of which are 'vital in a fast-changing world' (European Commission 2013, 4). At least in relation to preparing for FSP it might be necessary for teacher educators to collaborate more with both each other and with the schools and teachers with whom they work, to develop a more shared and less unplanned curriculum. As Hadar and Brody (2011) have pointed out, higher education is an example of an isolated profession and developing the learning community within ITE on crucial aspects of their work such as FSP remains a high priority. In addition, potential reforms in teacher education, particularly the acknowledgement of the crucial role of the practicum experience and the strengthening in many contexts of school-university partnerships presents a possible window of opportunity for changes in FSP provision where the integrated and multi-layered approaches advocated by Shartrand et al. (1997) and Epstein et al. (2002) might be possible. The call from the European Commission (2013) to promote and support regular dialogue among key stakeholders, feeding into national policy-making, improving ITE programmes and supporting the development of a shared vision – with a common understanding of what is meant by quality in educating teachers – seems to be highly relevant for this element of teacher preparation.

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