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The emergence of moral, professional, and political geographies in a clinically simulated parent-teacher interaction

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Clinical simulation pedagogy is proposed as an innovative data gathering approach.
- The PSTs' concerns led them to modify their language and emotional responses.
- The PSTs questioned the boundaries between home and school.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored pre-service teachers' (PSTs') actions during and reflections on a clinically simulated parent-teacher interaction. We used Hargreaves's (2001a) *Emotional Geographies of Teaching* framework to ground and interpret the simulation data. Results indicate PSTs wrestled with the concept of professionalism, held reservations toward the actual and probable reactions of the standardized parents, and constrained both their language and actions. Our discussion centers on the presence of moral, professional, and political geographies within complex parent-teacher interactions. Implications suggest the necessity of engaging with the practice of parent/caregiver communications, as well as the emotional geographies that undergird such interactions.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, there has been a great deal of research on parental involvement. Studies reporting the positive effects of parental involvement on student wellbeing are recognized by policy makers, teachers, parents, and students (Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001). As stakeholders recognize the importance of parent-teacher relationships, teacher preparation programs are responding to the need to prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) to engage in and establish effective partnerships with parents/caregivers. Effective partnerships, though, require teachers to successfully navigate unforeseen contexts (Epstein, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Hargreaves's Emotional Geographies of Teaching framework (2001a) highlights the uncertainties of parent-teacher partnerships, leading teacher educators to question how we might prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) to navigate different emotional geographies.

In this study, we use Hargreaves's (2001a) framework to examine PSTs' decision-making and facilitation skills within a clinically simulated parent-teacher interaction. We questioned what, if any, emotional geographies PSTs' might engage with and reflect on as they interacted with two (standardized) parents who disagreed on their daughter's post-secondary path(s).

2. Literature review

2.1. Emotional geographies of teaching

Following Denzin's (1984) assertions on the emotional contexts surrounding teaching and learning, we ground this study in the assumption that emotions arise from interactions between individuals, and we recognize the value of exploring individuals' experiences during their interactions with others. To examine the

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interactions between PSTs and standardized parents, we utilized Hargreaves's (2001a) Emotional Geographies of Teaching framework as both a conceptual foundation for designing this study and an analytic lens for interpreting the resulting data.

Hargreaves (2001a) recognizes teaching as a profession that links knowledge, cognition, and skill and requires emotional relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. The concept of *emotional geographies* guides the exploration of the emotional bonds between individuals via their emotional distance and closeness during a given interaction (Hargreaves, 2001a). There is no absolute definition for emotional distance or closeness between teachers and parents. Emotional terrain are shaped by culture and social context, and thus the emotional geographies of teaching are not concrete phenomena (Hargreaves, 2001a; Lasky, 2000). For example, the frequency of interaction between parents and teachers might not always result in emotional closeness (Hargreaves, 2001b).

Hargreaves (2001a) identifies five sub-groups of emotional geographies: *sociocultural, moral, professional, physical,* and *political*. *Sociocultural distance* occurs when race, culture, gender, and ability levels cause disassociation between teachers and parents. *Moral distance* generally takes place when teachers and parents cannot reach agreement or do not have similar views concerning what actions/decisions are in the best interests of a student. Conversely, moral closeness occurs when teachers and parents reach mutual agreement. *Professional distance* arises when the norms and definitions of teacher professionalism impact parents' and teachers' interactions. Professional distance might also lead these individuals, especially teachers, to examine and/or question the extent of professional boundaries. *Physical distance* can be seen in terms of the frequency and intensity of parent-teacher interactions. For instance, the number of parent-teacher interactions in a semester could be an indicator of the parents' and teacher's physical closeness to, or distance from, each other. Finally, *political distance* surfaces when there are elements of power and hierarchical power structures between teachers and colleagues, parents, or students. For example, parents or teachers might feel a need not to disclose their emotional reactions if they are reluctant to experience another party's reactions towards themselves.

In concert with Denzin's and Hargreaves's assertions on the emotional contexts of teaching, we emphasize the disequilibrating uncertainties of novice practice. Frequently, novice teachers refer to a distinct 'gap' between the requirements of teacher education and the challenges of classroom practice (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Shulman (2005) explores this gap between preparation and practice, noting the signature pedagogies across the professions of medicine, law, and the clergy that lessen the distance between preparation and practice. He argues, in part, that teacher education does not have clear 'signature' pedagogies that guide teacher candidates in exploring the uncertainties of the profession (2005). Shulman (1998) emphasizes the Piaget (1959) concept of cognitive disequilibration, noting that a "violation of expectations" (p. 519) results when novice teachers' expectations of practice do not align with their early classroom experiences.

Consider Hargreaves's Emotional Geographies framework in light of the perceived 'gap' between preparation and practice (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999), the perturbation that occurs when one experiences a situation one did not expect (Piaget, 1959), and the uncertainty that results within professional practice (Shulman, 2005). Viewing Hargreaves's framework through this broader lens of novice teacher uncertainty leads to questions of how to best illuminate and prepare novice teachers for the emotional, uncertain landscape of novice teaching. That is, how should teacher educators prepare teacher candidates for the broad sociocultural geographies of a given school, and the manifestations of race, class, gender, and ability contexts in daily classroom practice? How do novice teachers learn to navigate the hierarchies and power structures (i.e., political geographies) and are there ways that teacher educators can prepare them for the uncertainties and anxieties of these situations? Finally, how do novice teachers navigate the uncertain, nebulous boundaries between homes and schools (i.e., professional geographies), particularly as both parties – parents/caregivers and teachers – seemingly work toward the same goal of what is in the best interest of the child (i.e., moral geographies)? Difficult meta-questions such as these arise from Hargreaves's Emotional Geographies framework, but are sharpened when we examine the disequilibrating uncertainty they foster in novice teachers.

To examine our specific research question of what emotional geographies TCs might engage with in a clinical simulation, we turn to examine the continuing importance of parental involvement in schools, and the emerging position of clinical simulations in teacher education.

2.2. Parental involvement

Portions of the research body on parental involvement focus on the links between involvement and student achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2012; Park & Holloway, 2016; Wilder, 2014). For instance, Jeynes's (2003) meta-analysis of twenty-one studies on the effects of parental involvement on minority students indicates that parental involvement improves students' grades. Similarly, Park and Holloway (2016) observed a positive relationship between school-based parental involvement activities and students' performance in mathematics. A longitudinal study of the literacy skills of low-income students showed that parental involvement is associated with higher literacy skills and recommended increased parental involvement as a way of decreasing the achievement gap between high- and low-achieving students (Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004).

Parental involvement is associated not only with higher student achievement, but also with other positive student outcomes: decreased dropout rates (Parr & Bonitz, 2015), improved student perception of self-competence (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001) and positive transitioning to new school environments (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000). For instance, Barnard (2004) indicates that parental involvement in elementary school students' education corresponds with long-term positive effects, such as decreased high school dropout rates and increased on-time high school completion. Grolnick et al. (2000) found that students with involved parents showed increased competence, and their transitions to junior high improved.

While some research studies suggest a positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement and wellbeing, other studies have found no association between student achievement and parental involvement (Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 2001; Smit, Driessen, Sleegers, & Teelken, 2008), and others suggest a limited relationship (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2005; Domina, 2005; ElNokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Hawes & Plourde, 2005). For instance, in their meta-analysis, Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) found a limited association between parental involvement and student achievement and between parental involvement and positive changes in students' behaviors. ElNokali et al. (2010) claim these mixed findings on the positive effects of parental involvement on student achievement might be caused by selection bias or by the use of measures that are too broad to show a significant association. From another perspective, Gonzalez-Pienda et al. (2002) suggest that parental involvement has indirect effects on student achievement, either increasing self-esteem or decreasing