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Barriers to involvement in parenting activities in school-based preschools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Preschool is a particularly opportune time to introduce measures that promote parental school-based involvement, as this is when the initial contact with the school is made. In Québec, a French-speaking province in Canada, voluntary school-based preschools for 4-year-olds have been offered to families in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A component for parents comprised of 10 activities was developed specifically to promote parent involvement from the beginning of their child's schooling. However, some parents are more likely than others to encounter barriers that curtail their participation in these activities. Seventeen teachers working in preschools for 4-year-olds in targeted areas and 25 of their parents participated in this qualitative study. The study's objective was to identify the barriers to participation among parents whose involvement in school activities during the school year was low. Based on Hornby and Lafaele's conceptual model, a phronetic iterative analysis was used to describe the experiences reported by teachers and parents. Finally, the four main findings emerging from this study were formulated, and avenues for reflection by school-based preschool personnel were put forward.

Introduction

In Canada, as elsewhere in the world, the difficulties faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds when entering school are considerable (Brinkman et al. 2013; Simard and Lavoie 2018; Thompson, Marvin, and Knoche 2017). In Québec, a French-speaking province in Canada, data collected on preschool 5-year-olds in 2017 revealed that children attending schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are proportionally more often considered vulnerable in at least one of the five areas of their development (31.8%) compared to children attending schools in other settings (26.1%) (Simard and Lavoie 2018). In advancing equal opportunities the potential benefits of early intervention (Pikhart et al. 2014), such as parental involvement, are recognized (Barger et al. 2019; Ma et al, 2016). Parental involvement is a multidimensional concept that plays out in two different

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settings: home and school (Epstein, 1995). Although not all researchers agree on which aspects to include, Boonk et al. (2018) posit that home-based involvement can consist of parent and child exchanges about school, monitoring the child's progress, supporting educational activities at home, and help with homework. In comparison, school-based involvement refers to parents' participation in school-organized activities, classroom volunteering, exchanges with teachers, and school governance (e.g. school board) (Driessen, 2021). Literature reviews on preschool children have reported a positive association between school-based involvement and academic achievement (Boonk et al. 2018) and academic adjustment (Barger et al. 2019). For some years now, a parental participation component in school-organized activities has been included in school-based preschool to promote and foster school involvement (Schueler, McIntyre, and Gehlbach 2017). As preschool represents the first contact with the school, it is a particularly opportune time to implement measures that encourage school-based involvement (Thompson, Marvin, and Knoche 2017). For example, Sheridan (2020) shows that parent participation in school activities increases in preschool and decreases through the end of kindergarten. Likewise, participation in classroom activities or on parent committees is more frequent during preschool than elementary school (Murray et al., 2015). Yet, there are differences in why, when, and how parents engage in their child's education. Studies reveal that some families face more obstacles (Mahmood 2013; Poissant, Bénard, and Poulin 2021). For instance, research conducted in disadvantaged areas shows that the frequency with which parents participate in these activities during preschool is generally low (Marti et al. 2018). However, only a few studies deal with the barriers that deter parents from participating in school-based preschool activities. To better understand the barriers faced by these families, we can use a conceptual model of the barriers that undermine home and school-based parents' involvement in their child's elementary education. The model developed by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) has four main categories divided into 14 subcategories. These main categories are: 1) the characteristics of the parents and the context in which the families live; 2) the child; 3) the parent–teacher relationship; and 4) societal issues (see Table 1). Nonetheless, we do not know if this model can be applied specifically to parenting activities in school-based preschools. Moreover, although this model lists barriers, it does not distinguish between those

Table 1. Barriers identified in the Hornby and Lafaele model (Hornby and Lafaele 2011) (p. 39).

Categories	Subcategories
(1) Individual parent and family factors	(1) Parents' beliefs about PI
	(2) Perceptions of invitations for PI
	(3) Current life contexts
	(4) Class, ethnicity and gender
(2) Child factors	(1) Age
	(2) Learning difficulties and disabilities
	(3) Behavioural problems
	(4) Gifts and talents
(3) Parent-teacher factors	(1) Differing goals and agendas
	(2) Differing attitudes
	(3) Differing language used
(4) Societal factors	(1) Historical and demographic
	(2) Political
	(3) Economic

identified by families and those identified by school personnel. A comparison of the perspectives of parents and teachers would help identify the less obvious barriers to school-based preschool providers (Anderson and Minke 2007).

For example, in the study conducted by Demircan and Erden (2015), preschool teachers identified different barriers to parent involvement from those named by parents. Drawing on a conceptual model helps schools or ministerial authorities identify solutions.

The context of this study

The voluntary full-time school-based preschool program for 4-year-olds is currently being rolled out in all schools across the province. Compulsory school attendance in Québec begins at the age of six (6). Initially, families living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods were the original beneficiaries of this program. These districts had a higher proportion of families with children between 0 and 18 years of age classified as disadvantaged. This classification was based on the mother's level of education or the employment status of a parent.

The preschool program includes an activity component for parents that lays the groundwork for school-based involvement. Ten 2-h-long activities spaced out across the year bring the teacher and their students' parents together. A small budget is available for teachers to carry out these activities ($166 CAD per child). As a result, the content and the format can vary from one school to another (MEES 2015). For example, these can include discussions with parents about discipline, parent–child play activities, or outings to the library. Although parent participation is voluntary, there is a significant observable difference in the number of meetings parents attend during the year, varying between 0 and 10 (MEES 2015).

Research question

This study aims to identify the barriers to participation faced by those parents of school-based preschool children whose involvement in school activities offered during the school year 2019–2020 was low. The viewpoints of both parents and teachers were collected and contrasted to get a fuller picture of these barriers. Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) conceptual model was used to organize the data.

Methods

We used a phronetic iterative approach to answer our research question, as it was deemed the most appropriate for this study. In the context of this study, looking at the barriers to participation using a phronetic approach to research allows the data to be organized, interpreted, analyzed, and communicated to address concerns and promote social change (Tracy 2019). Furthermore, an iterative approach emphasizes specific aspects that could extend a theory or model. Therefore, a phronetic iterative analysis alternates between considering existing theories or models and emergent qualitative data. Thus, an analysis grid (codebook) based on the Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model was developed before coding began. The coders first checked the grid for each interview segment to see whether it matched one of the predefined categories. If not, the extract

was then classified as emergent and placed in a new category or subcategory. In this way, the codebook was modified on an ongoing basis.

Design

Teachers of full-time 4-year-old preschools from 14 schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in areas surrounding a large city in the province of Québec (Canada) were asked to participate in the study. Of the 29 teachers in the selected schools, 18 agreed to participate. One teacher withdrew during the school year for health reasons. The teachers then asked all parents of students from these 17 classes to participate in the study and respond to two questionnaires. This article does not refer to these questionnaires. Of the 235 eligible parents, 111 completed both questionnaires. According to the teachers, the reasons why parents did not participate in the study were the lack of communication with the teacher and language barriers. Based on the attendance records compiled by teachers, two parents with the lowest rate of participation in the activities organized by the school were chosen from each class and re-invited to take part in a telephone interview at the end of the school year. Of the 34 eligible parents, 25 were reached, and all agreed to be interviewed. These parents had participated in three or fewer of the ten meetings held during the year. There were no differences in the main socioeconomic variables between the parents ($n = 25$) agreeing to be interviewed and those who completed the questionnaires ($n = 86$) or those who could not be contacted ($n = 9$).

Sample

The 17 teachers ranging in age from 23 to 58 were all female ($M = 40.7$; S.D. = 12.0). Most were full-time permanent teachers with an average of 5.7 years of teaching experience (S.D. = 4.5) in preschool (4 and 5- year-olds). Of the 25 parents interviewed, 23 were mothers, and 2 were fathers. The parents' average age was 35 years (S.D. = 4.2), 40% were born outside Canada, and 96% spoke French at home (Québec's official language). Furthermore, 40% were parents of three or more children, and 88% were two-parent families. Among them, 40% had a university degree, 20% had a college education, and 20% completed secondary school or technical studies or did not have a diploma. Also, 32% of the parents were unemployed. Thirty-two percent of families were below the Canadian low-income threshold, 40% near the threshold (100% to 199%), and 28% over the threshold (200%+). Overall, 60% of the parents fitted at least one of the three criteria for deprivation (unemployed, a mother without a diploma, and a family below the low-income cut-off).

Data collection and analysis

The authors developed separate semi-structured telephone interview protocols for the teachers and parents. The interviews were conducted at the end of the school year and lasted around 45 min. The teachers were invited to discuss the following topics: their perceptions of parental involvement in the parenting activities, the barriers to parental involvement, the challenges encountered in the organization of activities, and recommendations for improving this component. Likewise, parents were invited to discuss the

following topics: their participation and their spouse's participation in the parental activities, their appreciation, and why they had not participated in activities. Financial compensation was given to parents ($20 CAD) and teachers ($40 CAD) following their interviews.

The contents of the fully transcribed interviews were coded by two of the authors of this study using NVivo software, and any differences were resolved through discussion. The frequency of codes was counted for each subcategory. The findings emerging from the study are described below. Each participant was assigned a number, and verbatim extracts from the preschool teachers (T) and the parents (P) were translated from French to English for this publication.

Results

The findings emerging from the study are described below. The similarities and differences between teachers' and parents' viewpoints will be highlighted for each category. The subcategories identified in the Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model were used to organize the data. Table 2 presents the percentage of participants who mentioned each subcategory of barriers.

The barriers linked to individual parent and family circumstances

The barriers linked to parent or family circumstances were the most frequently mentioned by teachers and parents during the interviews. Based on the Hornby and Lafaele model, this category is divided into subcategories: 1) parents' beliefs about Parental Involvement (PI); 2) perceptionsof the invitations for PI,; 3) current life contexts; and 4) class and ethnicity.

Parents' beliefs about PI
None of the parents mentioned that their perceptions of their involvement in their child's education could affect their participation in the activities. For most teachers (88%), the problem was the parents' beliefs about the relevance of involvement. Teachers report that parents see little importance in collaborating with the school because they neither

Table 2. The percentage of participants who mentioned each of the barriers.

Categories	Subcategories	Teachers n=17	Parents n=25
Individual parent and family factors	Parents' beliefs about PI	88%	-
	Perceptions of invitations for PI	-	16%
	Current life contexts	76%	56%
	Class and ethnicity	94%	80%
Child factors	Age	29%	-
	Learning difficulties and behavioural problems	35%	12%
	Talents	12%	12%
Parent-teacher factors	Differing goals	18%	16%
	Lack of communication	24%	16%
	differing language used	29%	-
Societal factors	Family-word balance issues	59%	40%
	Lack of information, training and overload	76%	28%
	Limited budget	41%	-
Activity factors	Themes	29%	12%
	Format	12%	24%
	Quantity	12%	8%

communicate with the teacher nor the school. One recounts that: *the parent that I have no connection with, there isn't any with the teachers of their brother or sister either. It's really someone who is not interested in school at all (T$_{12}$)*. Other teachers mention that some parents see less value in participating in the activities offered at the start of preschool, as they have already had other children go through elementary school. Teachers also said that parents do not see any value in being involved because they do not invest time in home-based educational activities, even those requiring little skill or knowledge, such as going outside to play with their child. A teacher says: *for them, it is not always clear to simply go out to play outside. This is not a demanding task, but parents appear less aware and invested in its educational value (T$_{18}$)*. They also highlight that connecting with parents who have bad experiences with school is quite challenging. A teacher explains the situation: *I think he just did not fit into school when he was young. So, he kind of steps back from any participation. This certainly makes it difficult to develop a relationship with this parent (T$_{11}$)*.

Perceptions of the invitations for PI

Not all the parents (16%) feel welcome at school, which creates a barrier to participation. However, none of the teachers raised this as a barrier. For instance, the school's safety rules that limit circulation inside the building are seen as a lack of openness on the part of the school. One parent shared their thoughts about this situation:

> On the one hand, we are often invited to come and do activities, which is really cool. But on the other hand, we cannot come into the school. It's a question of security, but it is a little extreme. I am welcome, but not all the time. Let's face it; it's like a double message. It could mean: "Well then, if I am not able to come into the school, I am certainly not going to come in for an activity". I think that the school has made a good effort to open up in terms of its intentions, but in terms of practice, I think we are not that welcome (P$_{701}$).

Other parents simply say they have not been invited to participate in activities. For example, one parent makes this clear: *I have never been invited to an activity or a parent day with the children (P$_{107}$)*.

Current life contexts

According to the majority of teachers (76%) and parents (56%), the context of family life in relation to health problems, various living situations with numerous offspring, and transport constraints, make the possibility of participating in activities more complex. For example, physical health issues (pregnancy/childbirth, operations, or sick children or parents) or mental health problems (substance abuse, intellectual deficiency, specific learning disabilities) could lower parental participation in activities. Likewise, both teachers and parents mentioned the presence of siblings, the absence of a support network to look after them, and the challenges of travelling to school. Several teachers added to this list of difficulties: violent situations within the family, negligence, problems with the law, and parental competency. For example, one teacher understood the situation in the following way: *I am thinking of a mother, who was nevertheless quite involved, a mother who was going to have a third child; it was a situation of familial violence. Her, she was pretty involved with her child so that he would be stimulated; that was obvious. But, at the same*

time, the seriousness of the situation didn't change. So, sometimes, she might have neglected a little what the school asked for (T2).

Class and ethnicity

Nearly all teachers (94%) and a great majority of parents (80%) named barriers linked to work, culture, language, or education. The teachers and parents agree that those with jobs could not participate in activities as these were organized during the day. One teacher explained that: *they were all in jobs that did not allow them to come to the activities. I am not talking about willingness but rather capability (T_{12})*. Moreover, for parents born outside the country, a lack of information about schooling in Québec could deter participation. One parent explains that: *it was the first time I had taken my child to a school. So, I don't know very much about the system. So, little by little, I learn, I inform myself, I watch. Maybe, it is for this reason that I am a little cold towards it* (P_{401}).

Teachers added a few more barriers. According to them, immigrant parents participate less when they have not mastered the language used in the school or have divergent views on children's education. One teacher noted difficulties related to understanding French: *Sometimes, parents don't have the correct information about evening activities* (T_{10}). Teachers were the only ones to mention the low socioeconomic status of families (including income, education, and weak literacy skills) as an obstacle to participation. One of them explains the situation of parents in her class with low levels of education: *Among my students, I have two whose parents are illiterate, or almost. They literally write by sounds. I'm not sure they had much schooling. For these parents, it is difficult to come to school. They feel incompetent* (T_{16}).

Barriers related to children

Child-related barriers were seldom brought up by the teachers and even less so by the parents. This category is divided into three sub-categories: the child's age; learning difficulties and behavioural problems; and talents.

Age

None of the parents raised the age of the child as a barrier. However, almost a third of the teachers (29%) expressed concern that parents view preschool as a daycare that requires less involvement on their part. Here is one teacher's concern: *It is the second time that I've taught in a disadvantaged neighbourhood*, and [previously] *I have never experienced a situation where I felt that some parents thought that school was a daycare centre and not a place where you actually learn, where it is necessary to get involved* (T_{11}).

Learning difficulties and behavioural problems

According to a few parents (12%) and around a third of the teachers (35%), exchanges around the child's difficulties or behaviours can cause a breakdown in teacher-parent communication. One mother explains that: *they tend to say that if the child is poorly educated, if the child is this, it is the parents' fault (P_{1703})*. According to teachers, some parents are in denial about problems or feel judged because of them. One of them recounted an experience with a mother where communication had broken down: *I have a mother with whom I had really good communication, but her daughter had*

problems at some point. And, when we wanted to talk about her daughter's problems, well, she cut all ties (T₆).

Talents
A few teachers (12%) and parents (12%) mentioned that parents feel it is no longer necessary to be involved once the child has successfully integrated into the school. One teacher explains the situation in this way: *Why are they less involved? Well, the children are doing well (T₆)*. For one parent, as her child had no difficulties, her participation in an issue-based workshop was unjustified. She says: *I don't have any particular difficulties with my children. Things are going well. Maybe, if I had children who had more problems (P₁₂₀₂)*.

Parent-teacher factors

This category of factors is divided into three subcategories based on Hornby and Lafaele and includes differing opinions, lack of communication, and the use of a different language.

Differing opinions
Some parents (16%) and teachers (18%) had diverging opinions on the expected competencies for 4-year-olds. These differing expectations could be a source of tension within the parent-teacher dyad. One mother explains her situation with her twins:

> Every day, they are nagged at because they don't get dressed quickly enough. They have not tied up their boots. They are constantly scolded because it's not done quickly enough. Me, I don't find that great. The child came back and did not even want to go to school. At some point, I almost took them out of preschool because I thought it was too young, at that age, to be stressing them and saying: "Go, go, go, hurry up"(P₁₃₀₄).

Lack of communication
Some parents (16%) criticize the teachers for not communicating enough with them, such as what the child is doing, what they are learning, or what happens during the day. One mother wants information: *more communication, a few more details about the day that I know they don't always have the time to write much, and when they don't have such a good day, she always took the time to write well, but sometimes it would be fun to know exactly what the child is doing (P₁₈₀₃)*. However, some teachers (24%) criticize parents for failing to follow up on communications, not keeping their word after confirming their presence in activities, or having an inappropriate attitude toward them. For example, one teacher talks about one of the families in her class: *The parents are separated. The father is very aggressive; it is impossible to communicate with him. But, on the other hand, I would say that the mother has a good head on her shoulders* (T₄).

Use of a different language
None of the parents talked about this barrier. However, nearly a third of the teachers (29%) noted that language differences could constitute an obstacle in the language used in activities. One teacher recounted that she had to immediately adapt during the initial contact with the parents to make herself understood: *I introduced myself to them and*

presented a few of the program's objectives and all that. I immediately realized that I needed to adapt my vocabulary because I was not being understood. So, there was really a breakdown at that level (T₂).

Barriers linked to societal or organizational factors

Teachers and parents frequently mentioned barriers related to societal issues or organizational factors. This category of factors is divided into three subcategories: demographic, political or policies and economic.

Demographic (family-work balance issues)

A majority of teachers (59%) and several parents (40%) spoke about contemporary family-work balance issues. One parent explains the importance of putting one's energies in the right place when it comes to work and family obligations: *One cannot just unnecessarily miss work. Well, it's not unnecessary, but I prefer to keep them for when they fall sick (P₁₈₀₂).* One teacher thinks that: *because they're busy parents with big families, who work, and their children are in preschool, which is already very important for their development, and yes, they do take school to heart, but they don't have time. I don't think it's because they don't want to (T₁₂).*

Political (Lack of information, training, and work overload)

A great majority of teachers (76%) and some parents (28%) feel that the recent addition of a new parent activity component to Québec's Preschool Education Program for 4-year-olds has been somewhat problematic. Firstly, both teachers and parents mention the component's lack of guidelines. Parents lack information on the expectations of the program. One teacher explains the problem as follows: *there are no protocols from the school board that say, 'Okay, we want you to have such and such activities. Well, meet people whenever you want, daytime, evening'. There is no defined protocol. So, it's hard to fit it all together (T₇).* Moreover, as recounted by teachers, the recent emphasis on the involvement of parents in preschool is not an aspect that is well managed by everybody. Indeed, some mention the lack of training in how to carry out these activities. According to one of them: *it is always a little stressful to see parents, to wonder how they will react. Will some of them go against you? Or will most of them cooperate? It may be that a parent is unhappy with what you give as a service or, in fact, it is not a service but what you bring to their child (T₁₈).*

The extra workload required to organize these activities also worries the teachers and one parent. According to one of the teachers: *Organizationally, it was tough because you had to choose the activity. What activities are we going to offer this year? The budget has to be worked out. A meeting has to be set up with the school's administration. It's a lot of work, and we often worked through the lunch hour during our breaks (T₁₃).* The workload combined with low participation in the activity is somewhat demotivating for one teacher. She says: *it takes time to plan, find a date, and produce the letter of invitation. That takes time, and when you have zero parents, it's because it takes away my motivation for next year to organize activities if I don't have parents. I mean, I do not work in a vacuum. I work for my students first of all. So, I'm going to spend my time on other things (T₁₂).*

Economic (limited budget)

The parents never mentioned economic factors. However, several teachers (41%) reported that economic factors negatively affect participation. The teachers also refer to the fact that it is unclear how they can spend the allocated budget on a parent activity. According to them, the limited budget makes it difficult to organize evening and weekend activities. One teacher explains the constraints related to overtime: *We decided that we would always do it during the day because if we did it on nights and weekends, we would have to take the money from the parent component to be monetarily compensated (T_5).*

Barriers related to the characteristics of the activities

A new category, characteristics of the activities, was derived from the participants' remarks and added to Hornby and Lafaele's model, along with three subcategories linked to the activities, namely: 1) the topics covered; 2) the format; and 3) the number of activities offered.

The topics covered

Almost a third of the teachers (29%) and a few parents (12%) felt that a low participation rate in activities could be explained by a lack of interest in the topics covered in these activities. As reported by the teachers, the topics must appeal to the parents. One teacher says: *Perhaps some topics should be reviewed. Perhaps, some topics scared them more than others. It's true that we say reading is super important, but if a parent has never read stories to their child, it's a sure thing that he will not come to the workshop on reading. That won't be of any interest to him (T_7).*

Furthermore, several parents and teachers considered that the information given during these meetings was superficial. Since, as reported by teachers, parents' knowledge seems to vary greatly, activities that take the form of a presentation sometimes provide basic information, which in the end can either be more or less valuable. One parent expressed her disappointment when she went to such an event: *In the end, it was useless; I was pretty disappointed (P_{1107}).*

Format for the activities

Few teachers (12%) and some parents (24%) raise the point that some activities are less appealing because of their format. Thus, more formal presentations and activities aimed at sharing experiences in the form of discussion among parents attracted the fewest participants. One teacher talks about this type of activity which proved to be somewhat unpopular in her group: *The idea of sitting there, chatting, the parents talking with each other. And that's also another thing: it is a group of parents from a neighbourhood where it is not easy, and sometimes, even between them. I have a mother who came to see me after a meeting and told me she was discouraged by what they were saying. Talking about our experience as parents and all of that, for my group, it wasn't a winner (T_2).* In contrast, the appeal is more evident when the activities involve the children, such as a craft or a Christmas presentation.

Number of activities

Lastly, a few teachers (12%) and parents (8%) thought there were too many parental activities in the component for 4-year-old preschool and, consequently, were repetitive. One parent suggested *Perhaps, it is better to focus on quality rather than quantity. Organize it and make it really worthwhile, make it something that is really well organized so that it really is, so that the parent comes out of it impressed and says: 'Oh well, it was really worth missing work and losing three hours of work today for this' (P$_{701}$)*.

Discussion

Results reveal a wide range of barriers to participation in parenting activities and can be identified under five (5) main categories. The Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model proved to be very practical, as the barriers identified by the respondents were linked to the four original categories: 1) individual parent and family factors; 2) child factors; 3) parent-teacher relations; and 4) societal factors. However, our results show that there is merit in adding a new fifth category: the characteristics of the activities.

Four findings that emerge from this study will now be discussed. The first finding shows there is a strong consensus between teachers and parents regarding the barriers. Among those identified in this study, 11 of the barriers were mentioned by the two groups of respondents. Thus, school staff have a mutual understanding of the situation of families and the factors that may constrain their involvement. Since the school staff is often responsible for researching strategies that reduce barriers to parental involvement, this finding is particularly reassuring. Thus, school staff can effectively circumvent or mitigate obstacles by being creative and flexible, especially toward those families living complex realities.

The apparent lack of parents' physical and psychological availability to participate in activities is made evident through their remarks. Employment and issues around work-family life balance came up very frequently. Other studies have also found that these demands, sometimes seen as minor, constrain parents' availability (Kocyigit 2015). Problems of physical and mental health or those linked to other difficulties in life, such as the presence of violence within a family, also restrain the psychological availability of some parents. The families may well value education and their child's success, but the challenges of daily life may already draw on all their resources. Other researchers have come to a similar conclusion. For example, in the American Head Start program, the mothers who showed symptoms of depression participated less in school activities than those who had never suffered depression (LaForett and Mendez 2010).

As found in other research, the second finding reveals discrepancies in the ways teachers and parents perceive involvement. Undoubtedly, teachers thought parent participation in school activities was low because preschool for 4-year-olds was seen as just another daycare service. Neither did teachers feel that parents were very involved in educational activities at home nor that they attached much importance to school-family collaboration. Kocygit (2015) reports that preschool teachers and administrators are sometimes faced with a lack of interest on the part of some parents, the absence of feedback, or negative attitudes towards involvement. On the other hand, some parents in this study report that they feel either unwelcome or judged. These gaps in perception are troubling, as there appear to be significant dissimilarities between respective

expectations. Indeed, we can surmise that how parents invest with their children may be different from the explicit expectations formulated by the school of what a parent must do (Charette 2016). In addition, the intent of the program was to foster collaboration with families, but the activity component may be aimed toward the pedagogicalization of the parent through the transmission of more informative content. Indeed, this approach seems to arouse less interest than more playful activities.

Differences in language and attitudes between teachers and parents might explain each group's critical appraisal of the other. The low frequency of communication, lack of time to create a personal relationship with each family, or even the use of less useful means could be another explanation. Working in a school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood may make teachers more critical of the capacity of parents to support the success of their child. This hypothesis is echoed in the words of those who highlight that whereas parents may be considered experts when it comes to their child, their skills for educational purposes are less acknowledged (Einarsdottir and Jónsdóttir 2019).

The third finding emerging from the study is that the school must support the involvement of parents through the use of informational, human, and financial resources. Bierman, Morris, and Abenavoli (2017) note that parent involvement requires strategies to support it. Our results reveal that the budget allocated for activities is insufficient to allow teachers to organize evening or weekend activities because of overtime costs. The organization of these activities also imposes extra work on teachers, for which they receive no remuneration and little help for the logistics and the running of the meeting.

The final finding is that the characteristics of the activities offered are instrumental in attracting families to participate. It is clear that for both groups of respondents, the content must be helpful and interesting for parents. To identify the content, Mendez (2010) suggests encouraging parents and teachers to interact to get to know each other better. Furthermore, several teachers and parents say that priority must be given to the quality rather than the number of activities. As the activities call for efforts by both parties (preparation by teachers and time management and scheduling by parents), these efforts must be worthwhile. Hence, three new barriers should be added to the model.

Possible solutions

We can identify possible solutions to the barriers raised by teachers and parents. In consideration of the reduced availability of working parents, researchers suggest finding out more about the parents' working hours and varying the times of the activities offered (Kocyigit 2015). It would also be helpful for parents who cannot participate in those activities organized by the school to provide, for example, home-based educational activities or regular information (Marti et al. 2018). To allow parents with a lot of responsibilities to attend a workshop, either free babysitting or not having to prepare the evening meal may be incentives to consider. Another option could be to let them come to school to do voluntary work at other times than those set for activities or offer online activities that do not require any travel or daycare. To reach parents having complex family realities, the researchers insist on the importance of understanding the family's needs and adapting interventions accordingly. For example, start with a needs analysis at the beginning of the school year to identify which families should be closely followed (LaForett and Mendez 2010) or connected to resources or specialized services. In

this context, partnerships with community organizations that support families can be helpful as they can refer them to specialized services and support staff to develop more effective strategies to involve the families.

To reduce the deficit perspective of teachers, many researchers recommend implementing training sessions dealing with the importance of collaboration with parents, ways of communicating with them non-judgmentally and creating welcoming environments (Hachfeld et al. 2016). It would be advisable to dedicate the first few activities to creating a relationship with families before implementing activities that encourage parents to do educational activities with their child. Another option would be to open up the school more to create a welcoming environment for the whole community.

One suggested solution to the teachers' work overload would be to calculate and recognize the time required to create a meaningful connection with families in the workload and the time dedicated to planning, implementing, and evaluating activities (Kocyigit 2015). Other solutions would be to join forces with a co-facilitator who knows firsthand the issues of collaborating with families or reduce the burden of activity planning by offering conferencing online.

The Québec government has opted for the organization of activities to support family involvement. However, these activities themselves create additional barriers to the broader barriers of parental involvement in education. Should the organization of activities be one of several means put forward and not the only one advocated, as is currently the case? Shouldn't part of the money allocated be used to train staff so that parents feel they are seen as equal partners?

Strengths, limitations, and future studies

This study presents several strengths that should be highlighted. First, the fact that the full-time 4-year-old preschool program in Québec includes a component that specifically targets parental activities provides a unique opportunity to understand better the barriers that may constrain the participation of preschool parents. Also, our research design considered the viewpoint of teachers who carry out this component of the program and that of the least-involved parents, even though it was offered in their child's class. Lastly, a significant number of teachers and parents were interviewed individually.

However, some limitations must be mentioned. This research was conducted with a small number of volunteer teachers and parents in one geographic region of the province of Québec. Despite efforts to solicit parental participation through the teachers, many were suspicious about the research or did not respond to the teacher on other subjects. Based on the socio-demographic data of the sample, we have probably reached the most educated parents and those with the most resources but who, nevertheless, live in disadvantaged areas. The families that were the most difficult to reach through the school were also the most difficult to reach for the research project. This phenomenon has also been observed by other researchers (Bonevski et al. 2014). It may be assumed that the barriers mentioned by more educated families (e.g. those related to the constraints of working hours) would have been less often cited by a sample that included a higher proportion of unemployed parents. The results in Table 2 should therefore be read with circumspection. Alternative methods of recruiting families will need to be considered.

Finally, the results come from preschool organizations in Québec, and they may have highlighted barriers unique to that context. It would be interesting to focus subsequent research on cultural differences and parents' experiences from other preschool settings.

Conclusion

This study has identified 16 barriers to parents' participation in activities organized by schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In general, all subcategories identified by the model of Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) were echoed by the participants. The analysis throws light on the similarities and differences between the viewpoints of teachers and parents. Further research to investigate the barriers based on the characteristics of pre-school parents would be useful.

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