Teachers’ Role in Supporting Partnerships and Parental Engagement from Finnish and Portuguese Parents’ Perspectives

Cristiana Levinthal

University of Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

The positive influence of parental engagement in education on children’s learning is universally acknowledged. However, parental engagement is dependent on effective parent–teacher partnerships and on teachers’ support for engagement. Current educational aims for a holistic pedagogy call for the activation of parents’ full potential to partner with teachers in order to promote the learning of the whole person. In the present study, we explored parents’ perspectives on the role of teachers in supporting parent–teacher partnerships and parental engagement, in pedagogically holistic school contexts, in Finland and in Portugal. Nineteen parents (NFItn = 10; NPRt = 9) were interviewed about their experiences of teacher-parent partnerships and engagement with their children’s school. The data were analyzed by inductive content analysis.

Results indicated three main patterns in the parents’ narratives about the teachers’ support for partnership and parental engagement: communication, professionalism, and invitations to active participation. Culture-specific patterns where also identified. Finnish parents evidenced partnerships and engagement grounded in little face-to-face contact, but consistent online communication, as well as trust in teachers’ professionalism and independent work. Portuguese parents, on the other hand, revealed frequent active participation in the school, recurrent face-to-face communication, and appreciation for teachers’ welcoming responses to parents.

Findings will be discussed regarding the teachers’ role in supporting partnerships with parents and parental engagement with school, within the context of teacher education. Similarities and differences between the Finnish and the Portuguese contexts will also be discussed from a methodological point of view.

Keywords: teachers' support; parents’ perspectives; parent-teacher partnerships; parental engagement