Is the customer always right?

An examination of neoliberal ideology and its influence on parent-teacher interactions

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Lakehead University - Faculty of Education

Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada

January 2019

Acknowledgements

To my husband, Shawn Doucet, for taking this leap with me. Mon ami, mon amour, mon partenaire. Je t'aime.

My children, Lola and Adèle, who were patient and kind when their mom was busy writing and researching. Je vous aime fort!

My parents, Chris and Jim Whately, for their love, encouragement, and boundless support. I would not be here without you both. You have taught me that love and generosity are the heart of a family. I am so grateful and lucky to have you two as parents and friends.

My sister, Jessica Thompson. I can't thank you enough for the edits, but more importantly, for talking me off my ledges.

My brother, Thomas Whately. The way you see the world and your zest for life is always an inspiration

My in-laws, Dorothy and Maurice Doucet for their unwavering support and love.

My best friend, Dr. Michelle Venter. Your advice on academics and relationships always came at the perfect times.

There is no thank you big enough for my supervisor Dr. Gerald Walton, who encouraged and challenged me to become a better writer and to help me discover that I was indeed a researcher. Thank you for your quick responses full of detailed and pertinent feedback.

Love and thanks to Dr. Laurie Leslie for your tea, treats, support, and advice.

Melissa Burton for helping me to get my proposal to the next level, for sharing your snacks, and Friday giggles.

To my committee member Dr. Wayne Melville, internal reviewer Dr. Max Haiven, and external reviewer Dr. Renée Kuchapski for their time, insights, expertise, and support.

Special thanks to my grandmother, Mary McCart, my aunt Donna Trevisan, and great friend Ardina Ainsworth for helping me out of jams when I was in need for child care.

Jenna Bamford and Jennifer Mallette for checking up on me and keeping me laughing.

Many thanks to my participants for your thoughtful comments and the gift of your time.

Finally, while I could go on, many thanks to all those who offered encouragement, love, childcare, and most importantly, food during this whole process.

Abstract

This study explores how treating education as a private commodity may affect parent-teacher relationships, including the ways that parents perceive they are treated. The effects of neoliberal ideology on education transform schooling into a commodity and positions students and parents as clients. This research helps to inform both parents as well as teachers about the broader forces that may influence their interactions. Marketplace values shape educational acts and legislation through, for example, the imposition of standardised tests, management of teacher performance, and an increasingly higher-level of accountability. Such policies and procedures entail a shift towards teachers regarding parents more as clients to please or pander to, rather than as partners working together for the good of the children. Through one-on-one interviews with parents, the research question focuses on the examination of how neoliberal ideology might shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-perceived role in the schools of their children. Overall, the parents I interviewed did not view education as a commodity and teachers as service providers, but as my literature review demonstrated, there are many parents who do and will continue to make demands of teachers.

Keywords: Parent-Teacher, Neoliberal Ideology, Power, Elementary Education, Interactions

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field.

I'll meet you there."

– Rumi

The interactions between parents[1] and teachers can be complex and varied. According to a survey administered by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2011), 64% of teachers believe that the respect for their role and authority has decreased over the span of their career. Regarding parents' perceptions of teachers, there are many anecdotal commentaries, but the academic scholarship is limited. Some of these anecdotal articles, such as Worzel's (2016) article "Why parents don't respect teachers" in *TEACH Magazine*, point to some parents' inability to offer time to their children, or their children's teachers, due to being overburdened. Worzel (2016) also points to the issue of teachers being scapegoats of the government when problems arise in public education, which leads to parents placing blame on teachers for issues with their students and schools.

During my ten years as a teacher at the primary level, negative interactions with parents manifested as a significant challenge that I repeatedly faced, in spite of the fact that most parent/teacher interactions I had were positive. The negative interactions with parents not only affected me both physically and mentally but had a profound and lasting impact on my career.

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[1] Throughout my thesis, I refer to the people who care for children as parents. My intention is not to discount guardians or neglect to add their voices in my research. For the simple use of language, "parent" refers to the main guardian or caregiver of children, regardless of relationship with the child.

These interactions made me increasingly wary towards working with parents and ultimately led me to seek new challenges as an educator, which incited my return to university to further my education and understanding. In my first years of teaching, I found that most issues with parents were easily resolved with a phone call or meeting. Parents were mainly concerned about a test or subject, or they had misunderstood a lesson or assignment. These problems were quickly remedied with one conversation and rarely would these parents complain again without first calling to clarify their questions. In many of my dealings, I had a sense that I could develop an excellent rapport with parents when I made it clear that I was easy to approach through dialogue with the majority of parents.

Not all of my relationships with parents were positive; fortunately most of the time I did not encounter any major complaints or hostility. The few frightening experiences I had were mainly parents who had become irate or unreasonable. There were a few parents who were reluctant to discuss their problems or they were completely unwilling to compromise on any kind of a resolution. I remained calm while I consulted with the school administrators for the next steps. In the two most notable incidents I faced, the parents did not come back to discuss their issues and did not pursue their complaints to higher levels as they said they would.

In my last two years of teaching, I had a few encounters with a small number of parents that I would describe as more akin to a form of recurring harassment instead of any kind of working relationship that might involve compromise or seeking solutions. I endeavoured to remain calm, as I had done before, and tried not to take these grievances personally, but they started to wear on me, which eventually affected my daily life as a teacher. I became apprehensive with regard to the next complaint, with one parent, in particular, taking issue with each and every test given; I became gripped by stress each time I presented a new quiz to my

students. This apprehension undermined my day-to-day activities to the point that I was hesitant at times to speak in class, lest it be misinterpreted by my students then used against me in the next barrage of grievances. If an experienced, confident, and competent teacher could be brought down by a few parents, I cannot imagine how some of the new teachers with little experience will be able to deal with these types of incidents. With the support of family, friends, and peers, I came out stronger after these hardships. However, I fear that many others may not.

My experience is mirrored in a study conducted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2011), which found that most teachers surveyed generally have positive attitudes towards their work as educators, but mistreatment from parents was identified as a significant factor in some of the teachers' negative attitudes towards their profession. Additionally, Ewing and Smith (2003) found that, in Western countries, between 25% and 40% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career. More recent data suggests the percentage to be closer to 40-50% in the United States, although, the rates may not account for teachers leaving and then returning to the career (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, 2016). In recent years, teachers face greater pressures and demands (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011) and interactions with parents should become a source of support, rather than another negative factor for teachers to manage.

My professional experiences led me to this point as a graduate student, where I have come to view my experiences as an educator in a broader theoretical context. Specifically, I began to take notice of neoliberal theories in the courses that I took in the Master of Education program. Neoliberal ideology favours privatisation and individualism over public services and goods (Giroux, 2011; Peters, 2001). Flew (2014) explains that neoliberalism can be seen as many things and advanced in many ways, including as theory or policy discourse, as ideology, and

even as aligned with capitalism. In the case of parent-teacher interactions, neoliberal ideology might involve parents viewing themselves as 'clients'. Some interactions I experienced with parents felt, at times, like we were in a client and service provider relationship, which made me begin to question how these beliefs and ideals come to be.

Deslandes, Barma, and Morin (2015) found that many teachers feel as though parents behave as clients and placed high demands on them. The researchers also clarify that often the sharing of information and academic responsibilities is "more rhetoric than practice," since policies that are mandated by the government regarding parent-teacher interactions and parents' participation in school matters are not necessarily put in place (p. 131). McGrath (2007) offers similar findings, explaining that parent-teacher partnerships are founded on rhetoric because "it presumes a depth and commitment to the relationship that rarely exists" (pp. 1419-1420). McGrath (2007) delves further to state that "power and trust are central", but the fluctuation of power creates ambivalence in parents and teachers (p. 1419). This suggests that there are no clear roles for parents and teachers, which can lead to both parents and teachers struggling to know how to interact with one another.

In my role as a researcher, I became interested in examining the beliefs of parents with the goal of understanding how marketplace values influence parents to behave as clients, as well as to explore how these values may affect parent-teacher interactions. In my research, neoliberal ideology served as a theoretical lens through which to examine how parents perceive their behaviour when interacting with teachers, based on parents' perceptions of being a client who can demand services from their child's teacher(s).

Another consideration for my research is conflict, which Hammons (2017) states is a "natural occurrence in any relationship" (p. 30). She elucidates that parents and teachers should

work together to resolve conflicts in order to strengthen their relationships and she also states that students benefit when parents and teachers "model efficient conflict resolution skills" (p. 23). Hammonds further notes that there is a gap in the literature regarding parent-teacher conflict resolution.

Exploring conflict also made me consider issues of power. During my tenure as a teacher, I experienced various instances of power struggles with parents. At times, I felt like I had the upper hand, while at other times I felt powerless in the face of the parents' concerns or demands. Most often, there seemed to be an equal balance of power, where I felt neither party were dominating or being dominated in our interaction. In these instances, perhaps we both gave up some power in order to come to a compromise of sorts in regard to the end result. An openness was created between parties where the need to be in power was less important than the positive result for the benefit of the child. In the literature review, I further examined power and how it may affect interactions between parents and teachers.

In the following sections, I expound neoliberal ideology in more depth and then explicate my research problem, question, and purpose.

Neoliberal Ideology as Guiding Concept

My focus on neoliberal ideology is as a guiding concept that allowed me to examine how parents may perceive their role in education and how these ideals may affect parent-teacher interactions. A question I pondered was: If parents behave as clients, will they be more apt to demand services of teachers? Intuitively, the answer seems to be "yes", but I aimed to gain insights through the research I designed for this thesis.

To guide me, I read widely on the concept of neoliberal ideology. In general, neoliberal ideology advances the ideals of the marketplace and views human interactions as exchanges that

have a trade-off, and by which there is an exchange of goods and services (Flew, 2014; Giroux, 2011; Springer, 2016). Ulysse (2013) describes how neoliberal ideology affects all aspects of society including social, economic, and political structures. He explicates that there has been a shift from a "social welfare state" to a "market-driven state" that promotes individualism under neoliberal influences. Marketplace values of matching 'supply and demand' as well as the decentralisation of government in favour of private enterprises are neoliberal ideals (Turner, 2007).

According to Turner (2007), neoliberal ideology, as a concept, has its beginnings at Mont Pelerin in Switzerland, where a group of intellectuals met in 1947 to discuss economic liberalism and critique collectivism. Neoliberal ideology was a reaction to the Second World War, and the intent was to 'reconceptualise' liberalism and stress a return to classic liberal ideals of free trade and limited government control (Dean, 2008; Turner, 2007).

Patrick (2013) asserts that neoliberal ideology has shifted "beyond a hegemonic set of discourses and practice" to become doxa (p. 1). Bourdieu describes doxa as unquestionable or objective truth or common belief (Chopra, 2003). Chopra (2003) agrees with Patrick's (2013) statement of neoliberal ideology as doxa, explaining that neoliberal ideology has become entrenched through repeated acceptance of ideals, by not only politicians but through the public as well. As doxa, neoliberal ideology becomes virtually invisible and a part of the general belief in many member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of how the world operates (Wiseman & Taylor, 2017). Chopra (2003) argues that "an acceptance of the propositions of neoliberalism is seen as an inevitable recognition of the truth about the social world" (p. 424). If neoliberal ideology is now doxa, as Chopra and Patrick believe, then it would be reasonable to suggest that most people view marketplace values as how

the world normatively operates. Those who are aware of neoliberal ideology and are critical of it may feel it is futile to resist, and many may not even realise its overarching influence on government, education, and even citizens themselves.

Some researchers, such as Marginson (2006), believe that neoliberal ideology matches the "desires for commodified consumption now central to daily life" (p. 207). While Marginson is critical of neoliberal ideology, others, such as Chopra (2003), view the repercussion of commodification as a positive aspect. Marginson goes further to explicate that neoliberal ideology weakens democratic values in favour of market values, suggesting a shift in Western governments towards individual pursuits and employment with less emphasis on social initiatives and community development. Neoliberal ideology may be difficult to examine and perhaps difficult to challenge if it truly has become doxa, but many researchers, such as Apple (2006), Giroux (2010), and Marginson (2006), believe that this ideology must be examined critically.

Examining the influence and the power of neoliberal ideology includes developing an understanding of how neoliberal ideology operates. Neoliberal ideology can circulate in everyday actions, beliefs, norms, and assumptions, through governments, corporations, media, and the public education system, but also from individuals who may consider themselves consumers or entrepreneurs (Flew, 2014). Institutions and individuals may promote ideals such as government deregulation, privatisation, and standardisation without fully knowing that such ideals are characteristics of neoliberal ideology (Giroux, 2011). Western governments extol neoliberal ideals of individuality and privatisation through policies of standardisation and accountability, which then affects public schools with the implementation of standardised tests and excessive reporting (Giroux, 2016). It may not even be the case that institutions or

individuals openly praise neoliberal ideology and beliefs; they are embedded in policies, regulations, and through social values (Flew, 2014; Giroux, 2011; Ross & Gibson, 2007). Neoliberal ideology is often unnamed and unseen, including within education.

Neoliberal ideology also shapes the political and economic landscape, thereby directly affecting education through policies that favour budget constraints, larger classrooms, and in the United States, hiring unqualified teachers through Charter Schools (Baltodano, 2012; Connell, 2013). These types of changes may result in overworked teachers who have access to fewer resources, and possibly less employment. Policies such as the ones affecting schools and education may also be affecting parents in the middle and working-class when employees are forced to work longer hours, or even be forced to work several jobs part-time with less access to full-time employment (Apple, 2006; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). These stresses and constraints placed on parents and teachers could lead to further complications when it comes down to parent-teacher interactions.

The effects of neoliberal influences, such as individual rights or privatisation, might even be thought to be a positive consequence, shaping education as a commodity and its 'users' as consumers (Friedman, 1982). Friedman (1982) argued that parents should pay for their children's education, with subsidies given to those who cannot afford to pay even though they concede that private schools could "exacerbate class distinctions" (p. 79). The author praised the neoliberal value of individualism suggesting that governments and employers pay educators according to merit, offering greater competition and incentive to be a better teacher. Giroux (2010), in contrast, suggests neoliberal ideology has a negative impact on education and maintains that the promotion of consumerism and individualism is nearsighted and ultimately a great danger to the public good. Giroux (2016) elucidates that neoliberal influenced policies and reforms venerate

profit and accountability over creativity and imagination. Also, these reforms may encourage a sense of distrust in teachers through media campaigns and systematic government funding cuts (McMurtry, 1991). Vinson and Ross (2007) explain that "all services established for the common good are potential targets of investment and profit-making [and where] common good is replaced by individual advantage" (p. 64). Fostering individual achievement and academic success is a worthwhile endeavour as a classroom goal, but defunding education and creating an atmosphere of distrust is detrimental to fostering creativity, collaboration, and a sense of community, which are the greater goals of education (Endrizzi, 2008; Giroux, 2016).

Regarding the commodification of education, one may look no further than the language used to describe the roles of parents and students in schools. Often, parents and students are said to be "clients" by government bureaucrats, administrators, and even teachers (Katyal & Evers, 2007; Miretzky, 2004). When such language is used, parents and students will tend to expect and even demand services (McMurtry, 1991). Hill (2007) states that "the language of education has been very widely replaced by the language of the market" with words such as "clients," "products," and "delivery" (p. 119). This growing trend of parents and students as clients will foster the treatment of education as a commodity and weaken the democratic spirit of public education.

In brief, then, neoliberal ideology shapes policies and individual beliefs and is even venerated without awareness of its existence. While some researchers praise the outcomes that stem from neoliberal belief and ideology, others resist and challenge neoliberal ideals. Neoliberal ideology is a complex and influential ideology that is both revered and criticised. Some researchers argue that neoliberal ideology is a function of how the world operates (Chopra,

2003), while others argue that the ideology is detrimental to the social and political realms (Giroux, 2011).

In the next section, I describe my research and how a client-service provider relationship may affect interactions between parents and teachers.

Statement of the Problem

While most interactions between parents and teachers may be positive, there are times when conflict may occur; such conflict may signal neoliberal ideology as an influential factor. Much research has been done on how teachers can help to create partnerships with parents, but as previously stated, there seems to be little research on parents' perspectives on parent-teacher interactions, other than anecdotal articles. There are a plethora of blogs and online articles that comment on how parents view teachers, parents tips for teachers, as well as tips for parents from teachers (such as Giddens, 2011; Schwartz, 2018; Worzel, 2016) but most focus on giving advice on parent-teacher interactions directly to teachers (American Federation of Teachers, 2007; Bluestein, 2012).The literature on parent-teacher interactions focuses mainly on teachers' perspectives, which focus on how to deal with certain types of parents or as a direct guide to teachers on how to improve communication with parents (Christopher, 1996; McEwan, 1998; Worzel, 2016).

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of the research was to examine the perspectives of Canadian parents of elementary school children with respect to their interactions with teachers and to analyse those interactions to determine the extent to which they reflect a neoliberal ideology. According to the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2011), some teachers feel that parents are treated more like clients that educators are required to please. In situations such as a client-service provider

interaction between parents and teachers, neoliberal ideology may be at play. Neoliberal

ideology may be difficult to examine due to the belief that the ideology is now doxa (Chopra,

2003; Patrick, 2013), or simply difficult to pinpoint since they are many prevailing, as well as

conflicting, viewpoints on the ideology (Flew, 2014). While the results from the study show that

parents may desire to work with teachers to foster positive interactions, the literature review

suggests that the influence of neoliberal ideology on interactions between parents and teachers

may create a strain on relationships. Further research is suggested.

The qualitative research was informed by phenomenology and conducted through semi-

structured interviews. Participants were found through social media and non-probability

convenience sampling strategy due to time, availability, and budget constraints (Flick, 2009;

Iratzoqui & Cohn, 2014). The participants were all women from Ontario and New Brunswick

who have a child or children enrolled in elementary or middle school, specifically between

grades one and eight. The data were managed and organized by Atlas.ti software (Scientific

Software Development GmbH, 2018).

In order to examine parents' beliefs about parent-teacher interactions, I constructed the

following research question to guide my research:

How might neoliberal ideology shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-

perceived role in the schools of their children?

Various ideas from scholars guided my question. Interactions between parents and

teachers may be positive most of the time, but on occasion, these interactions may become

strained. Epstein (2009) and Hornby (2000) describe the importance of maintaining positive

parent-teacher interactions, but they also point out a well-documented history of contention

relating to issues such as academics and student behaviour (see also Hughes & Read, 2011;

Jaksec, 2005; Tingley, 2012). Collectively, such research focuses on how to improve

relationships and offer practical advice on how to interact with parents who, for instance, may be

aggressive and intimidating, or parents who may place blame for academic or behavioural issues

on other children or the teacher. Researchers may also advocate for open communication lines

between parents and teachers, meaning that both parties are generally available, honest, and

willing to discuss issues calmly and reasonably. However, the focus of many studies (see

Epstein, 2009; Hornby, 2000) between parents and teachers is often limited to interpersonal

communications, not accounting for the broader forces, neoliberal ideology being a key one, that

shape the interactions in the first place.

Neoliberal Ideology, Education, and Parent-Teacher Conflict

Neoliberal ideology was relevant to my research because I examined how parents might

perceive themselves as clients when interacting with teachers whom they may regard as service

providers.

Broader forces, like neoliberal ideology, may be pervasive and even all-consuming.

Through language and everyday actions, neoliberal ideology, much like most dominant

ideologies, may be viewed as simply existing (Flew, 2014; McMurtry, 1991; Sensoy &

DiAngelo, 2017). Marketplace values may be the desire for an exchange of goods, desire for

privatisation, or proclivity towards individualism (Flew, 2014; Giroux, 2011), which may

influence parents through government initiatives, policies, or individual beliefs. Parents who

request a change in schedule, a change in grade, or demand unfounded or unnecessary

accommodations for their children may be shaped by marketplace values or neoliberal ideology

(Deslandes et al., 2015).

Some scholars have examined the effects of neoliberal ideology on education, which transforms schooling into a commodity and positions students and parents as clients (such as Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010; Katyal & Evers, 2007). Giroux (2011, 2015, 2016) critiques how neoliberal values, as influenced by families and government, may shape parents' perception of these interactions. An outspoken critic of neoliberal approaches to education, Giroux takes a strong position against neoliberal ideology and its "culture of cruelty" (2016, p. 352), stating that high-stakes testing in schools with a focus on standardisation, reduces critical pedagogies and inventiveness in lessons. He further states that educational reforms influenced by neoliberal ideology "exhibit contempt for teachers and distrust of parents, repress creative teaching, destroy challenging and imaginative programs of study and treat students as mere inputs on an assembly line." (p. 352).

With the critiques of Giroux in mind, I critically analysed neoliberal ideology and its potentially pervasive influence on the interactions between parents and teachers. Neoliberal influences, such as making service demands are pertinent to parent-teacher interactions because they create a context in which interactions can become strained; teachers may face the ever-growing pressure to please their clients, the parents (Katyal & Evers, 2007). Such ideals and policies may influence parents to think of themselves as clients and to behave as such when demanding services for their child.

While various researchers (Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010; Katyal & Evers, 2007; Macbeth, 1989; Munn, 1993) have found that many teachers feel compelled by administrative or societal pressures to treat parents as clients, others, such as Lazar and Stoslad (1999) and Sykes (2001) believe the relationship between parents and teachers should be more of a partnership or parent-professional interaction. Epstein (2009) and Hornby (2000) each offer

models for supporting positive parent-teacher interactions. Epstein (2009) describes many ways to involve parents at the school, district, and state levels. She encourages partnerships through neighbourhood events and active collaboration within the community. Hornby (2000) also promotes community events, but he offers a partnership model which considers both parents and teachers to be knowledgeable when it comes to the child and encourages positive interactions between both parties. Moreover, Hornby also considers potential barriers to parent-teacher interactions, such as class, perceptions, and disabilities. The encouragement of partnerships between parents and teachers is the antithesis of neoliberal ideals of individuality. Encouraging partnerships will allow parents and teachers to work together rather than against each other.

Using neoliberal ideology as a framework guided my research to examine client-service provider relationships that can be experienced by parents and teachers. In advance of the literature review in the next chapter, I further examine the significance of my research, below.

The Significance of the Research

The significance of my research is framed by a context of neoliberal effects on education. I explored how neoliberal ideology may affect interactions between parents and teachers, specifically questioning parents' beliefs and thoughts. Neoliberal ideals may affect individuals who desire separation from the government or favour individualism over collectivism; they may wish to regain control of their own lives and be in charge of their own success or failure. They may also demand to choose to pay for services only they require, disregarding public initiatives and services (Turner, 2007; Ulysse, 2013).

Giroux (2010) questions the prevalent idea that every commodity or service is marketable and marketplace rules benefits all aspects of human life, which aids in an examination of neoliberal ideology as doxa and explores how neoliberal ideology pervades thinking and

reasoning without people necessarily having an awareness of its existence or influence. Parents may desire to have the best for their children without realising that the media influences their behaviour, or that government initiatives for individualised learning plans for all students and standardised testing may exacerbate the desires to ask for more for themselves while neglecting to support initiatives for the common good.

My overall impetus was to investigate neoliberal ideologies and critique its overarching influence on parents and schools. Through government policy, educational initiatives, everyday language, and parents' desires to obtain the best for their children, parents may be swayed to believe that they can make demands of teachers and that teachers should offer the services the parents request. While it is important for parents to have input into their child's education, Miretzky (2004) believes that it is more productive and democratic when parents and teachers show respect and trust for each other, rather than taking an adversarial, or client-service provider approach, which may create an imbalance of power.

This thesis is separated into six chapters, introduction, literature review, methods and methodology, analysis of interviews, reflecting on data and literature, and finally, the conclusion. The introduction in Chapter One explores neoliberal ideology as a guiding concept, my research question and its significance. Chapter Two examines the various forces at play when examining parent-teacher interactions, which were neoliberal ideology, power, parental engagement in education, and leadership support. Chapter Three consists of the methodology, methods, data collections, as well as possible limitation and assumptions for the research. In Chapter Four, I analysed the research and regarded the data with the codes, positive parent-teacher interactions, negative parent-teacher interactions, and indications of the influence of neoliberal ideology. Chapter Five are reflections of the data in light of the literature reviewed, which includes

questions that arose when considering the analysis. Chapter Six offers concluding remarks,

recommendations, and suggestions for both teachers and parents.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

"Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

– Oscar Wilde

My research explored parents' perceptions of interactions between themselves and teachers and how neoliberal ideology may impact these interactions. This chapter examines neoliberal ideology and education, parental engagement in education, parent-teacher interactions in general, and finally, leadership, support from administrators, and training. These areas lay the foundation for my research and aid in the understanding of how parents interact and engage themselves in education and, finally, how the administrators can support or hinder efforts to interact with parents.

A broad collection of literature exists that examines education within the framework of neoliberal policies, ranging from beliefs that neoliberal ideologies benefit or are a detriment to students and education. Western governments may promote neoliberal marketplace ideology through policies and procedures that, on one hand, are designed to build trust in public systems such as schools but, on the other hand, punish those same systems when they do not meet marketplace values and standards (Baltodano, 2012; Connell, 2013; Giroux, 2015; McMurtry, 1991). The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) act in the United States is an example of how policy can look like a step towards equity and social justice, but contrarily, gives teachers and administrators power to police students and to promote conservative values such as abstinence among other NCLB initiatives (Lipman, 2007). While NCLB has been replaced by 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the effects of NCLB remain. Vinson and Ross (2007) examine another policy, Standards-Based Educational Reform (SBER), which focuses on high-stakes testing and accountability "rather than on any more authentic understanding of the

complex realities of classroom life." (p. 62). These policies could result in parents doubting and mistrusting education, which may then lead parents to demand privatisation and corporate control, such as charter schools. Individuals and groups that believe in privatisation and accountability work to shape public perception about government subsidised services into negative opinions (Giroux, 2011) with promises that privatisation will solve issues of accountability and individualism (Friedman, 1982).

Parents may also find themselves under similar constraints, where neoliberal policies affect education, there may be similar policies that affect the workforce in general. The political ramifications of neoliberal ideology result in economic depression and unstable employment (Magnusson, 2000; Perkins, 2015). Through policies and regulations, governments may place constraints on employee benefits, healthcare, which may justify the raising of tuition for post-secondary education through allocating more funding into student financial aid (Magnusson, 2000). Parents may find themselves with a lack of access to education and better employment when neoliberal ideals affect policies and economic structures. Neoliberal ideology permeates economics structures through governments that promote individualism with assurances that the free market will offer greater opportunity to those that work hard (Friedman, 1982; Giroux, 2011; Peters, 2001; Ulysse, 2013). The belief in individual pursuits negates the reality that having less access to social programs may lead to barriers to potential success in education and employment (Giroux, 2010, 2011).

Giroux (2010) states that in neoliberal discourse, "compassion is viewed as a weakness and democratic public values are scorned because they subordinate market considerations to the common good" (pp. 1-2). This means that when individualism is praised, concerns for the public good by the government and even the citizens themselves may diminish greatly. Baumeister,

Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) examine why bad impressions, or events, make more of an impact on humans than good ones. They examine several factors that may influence this phenomenon, such as cultural values, upbringing, and neurological factors which may sway one's reactions to good and bad events, and "found bad to be stronger than good in a disappointingly relentless pattern" (p. 362). When the negative is in focus, humans are often drawn to dwell on what could go wrong. Thus, the impact of neoliberal ideology on education could potentially have a strong effect on parents since the drive for individualism and conformity could lead to anxiety and corruption (Connell, 2016).

Neoliberal Ideology and Education

Neoliberal ideology is widely regarded as an ideology that favours privatisation and individualism over public services and goods (Giroux, 2011; Peters, 2001). Most people, including parents and teachers, may not know about or have a limited understanding of its influence (McChesney, 1998). Neoliberal values often shape educational acts and legislation. For example, neoliberal policies include the imposition of standardised tests, management of teacher performance, and excessive accountability (Connell, 2016; Giroux, 2016). Such policies and procedures entail a shift towards teachers regarding parents more as clients to please or pander to, rather than as partners working together for the good of the child (Deslandes et al., 2015; Katyal & Evers 2007).

Neoliberal ideology, or marketplace ideology, as Baltodano (2012) and Mitchell (2003) describe, has an impact when rhetorical buzzwords such as "freedom" and "individuality" are used to entice governments, teachers, and parents to believe that they are doing what is best for each child. The freedom of parents to choose a school for their children as well as considering individual rights and responsibilities free of government constraints sound like enticing

prospects, but when contrasted with the reality of loss of public services, along with the

corporatisation of education, as suggested by McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001) and Mitchell

(2003), the perils of neoliberal ideology are illuminated.

As previously stated, teachers may be unaware of the overarching influence of neoliberal

ideology, but there is clear evidence that many teachers feel its effects. Baltodano (2012)

illustrates how teachers may find themselves under heavy constraints, including the forced use of

standardised testing and reduction in freedom in running one's own classroom. Baltodano states

that "neoliberalism has taken away the joy of learning, the creativity of teaching, and the

formation of strong public intellectuals" (p. 489). Mitchell (2016) goes further to state that under

neoliberal influence, educators are compelled to train students "to rely on themselves and to be

less oriented towards tolerance of difference, and more towards a kind of competitive or strategic

cosmopolitanism" (pp. 125-126). There is evidence that provincial governments compel schools

to act more like the marketplace than as a democratic public service (e.g., Education Quality and

Accountability Office, 2015; Government of New Brunswick, Ministry of Education, 2017).

Whether it is standardised testing in Ontario or 21st-century learning initiatives with a focus on

individualism in New Brunswick, the influence of neoliberal ideals are becoming more visible in

Canadian provinces with the implementation of these tests and policies.

If neoliberal policies help students to get jobs and enable them to navigate the global

marketplace, as Chopra (2003) and Friedman (1982) argue, then why not embrace it? Arnaldi

and Gorgoni (2016), Chopra (2003), and Friedman (1982) praise neoliberal influences on

governments and individuals. Arnaldi and Gorgoni (2016) believe that personal drive and

individual goals are important, especially in the domain of research and innovation. However,

they also critique the aspect of neoliberal ideology that privileges individual pursuits rather than

collaboration. While they state that teamwork is essential to advancements in technology, Arnaldi and Gorgoni (2016) believe proprietary ownership and rights are also significant when making discoveries, or inventing devices or concepts.

Chopra (2003) also emphasises the positive aspects of neoliberal ideology, such as technological advancements, social mobility, and more access to jobs. Chopra states that establishing neoliberal ideology will free the state from worrying about the welfare of citizens, which means that individuals will be in charge of their own success or failure. Friedman (1982) also believed in freedom from government constraints and influences, as he fervently confronted those who argue in favour of the free market, stating, "underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself" (p. 21). Friedman believed that public education had become an "indiscriminate extension of governmental responsibility" (p. 75). While he deemed it worthy for every child to acquire a basic education, he suggested that parents should pay for the schooling, and, if they are unable to, only then would special subsidies be given.

While there are positive outcomes of neoliberal policies such as advancements in technology due to globalisation, the possibility to find employment worldwide, and the possibility of social mobility, there appear to be more disadvantages than gains. Many researchers present the dangers, drawbacks, and consequences of neoliberal influences. Springer (2016), for example, takes a vehement stance against neoliberal ideology. He argues, "Neoliberalism is worthless. Neoliberalism is cruel. Neoliberalism is sick. It is a discourse that makes us feel hollow and meaningless, it instils our social behaviours with malice and spite, and is unquestionably making us ill" (p. 1). He goes further to state neoliberalism "fosters an individual ethic that allows selfishness to reap its own rewards" (p. 2). This position illuminates the fear that some teachers and researchers feel at the prospect of neoliberal ideology continuing

to influence government and policy. Springer (2016) shows genuine concern that neoliberal ideals will change the very landscape of Canada, in that neoliberal ideology will affect the dismantling of public services since there would be a loss of government aid favouring more control from the marketplace. Through his research, he examines how poverty, inequality, and violence are effects of neoliberal ideology.

If neoliberal ideology operates to shape the ways that parents and teachers think of their respective roles in the education of children without their awareness of the overarching influence, how can anyone understand the consequences of neoliberal ideology? In other words, how can something that cannot be directly seen or heard be examined? Has neoliberal ideology become doxa, "an unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth– across social space in its entirety", as Chopra (2003) believes it has? (p. 419). Teachers who question the *effects* of neoliberal ideology, even without knowing what "neoliberal ideology" means, do so when they stand up against standardised testing or privatisation of schools (Malsbary, 2016). Framing such opposition through a lens of neoliberal ideology provides conceptual understanding to explain the phenomena under examination, which is how I approached my thesis research. The scholarship on neoliberal ideology and education formed the basis of my inquiry, which was to explore how neoliberal ideology might shape parent-teacher interactions even while many remain unaware of it as a concept. The next section examines the power dynamics between parents and teachers. Power relations can be observed in all human interactions. Thus, parent-teacher interactions are matters of power.

Power Relations Between Parents and Teachers

While the concept of power is a complex and vast topic, French philosophers Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have been especially influential in scholars' understanding of

power. They each analysed the concept of power in ways that researchers continue to draw from, for their theories, as well as to critique them in an effort to further expound on the subject.

Foucault (1982) defined "the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions" or otherwise put, "action upon actions." (p. 791). What this means in the context of my research is that if a teacher, for example, were to exert their power, the parent would then react to that exertion, or another possibility could be that a parent reacts to a phone call from a teacher negatively because of previous experiences they had with teachers. Foucault (1982) goes further to explicate that "power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus" and that these actions are continual and perpetually circulated (p. 791). This means that power may be enacted as a result of internal and external forces, but also that people are the source of power. Without people, there is no requirement to have either compliance or resistance to the perceived power. Pylypa (1998) examined Foucault's research of individuals and power and states that "we are all the vehicles of power because it is embedded in discourses and norms that are part of the minute practices, habits, and interactions of our everyday lives" (p. 23). Actions of power, great or small, may often be exercised or resisted unknowingly. Which means that human interactions are often shepherded by a push and pull of power, with parties acting or reacting according to beliefs, cultural status, past experiences, or perhaps even mood. Foucault (1977) believed that power exists in all human interactions, but that power is unstable and changeable. Thus, interactions between parents and teachers may be in constant flux, with power fluctuating back and forth between parties.

Zipin (1998) describes how Foucault researched power without the impetus to find an origin of power, but instead, regarded power as ever fluctuating and employed from myriad points. The examination of institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, asylums, the military,

and the workplace led Foucault to regard micropower and how individuals could be shaped in a

seemingly gentle and innocuous manner through these institutions (Marshall, 1990). Micropower

is different from other forms of power because it is imposed by shaping individuals through

institutions by way of small, everyday actions to correct and/or shape behaviour and attitudes.

Foucault also examined how people self-monitored and self-disciplined themselves to conform

to the norms of institutions (Pylypa, 1998). For example, in education, parents and teachers,

depending on social status or belief systems, as well as the institutions they belong to (i.e.,

parents are part of the family institution and teachers are part of the education institution) may

behave in certain ways to align with their beliefs. This means that micropower may be at play

without individuals' awareness of its influence, or otherwise put, how they were raised by their

parents or how they were taught in school may influence their everyday actions. Foucault (1977)

examined how micropower permeates interactions and interplays and how those with more

power, and those with less, both perpetuated these fluctuations. In the instance of a parent-

teacher interaction, for example, a teacher would exert their authority (or power) and a parent

would either resist or comply, to that exertion.

Similarly to Foucault, Bourdieu examined power in social settings and viewed power as

circulating through social, symbolic, economic, and religious capital. Swartz (1996) describes

Bourdieu's definition of symbolic power as "a form of power that is not perceived as power but

as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the service of others (p. 77).

Swartz regards Bourdieu's belief that "culture (in the broadest sense of the term) can become a

power resource" (p. 43). Bourdieu also expounded that people (or actors) "misrecognize the

arbitrary character of their social worlds" (Swartz, 1997, p. 126), which means that people often

perpetuate and reproduce their social world without realizing it. The reproduction of their social

world implies that individuals behave according to how they were taught by their social institutions, such as families, communities, and schools.

Barrett DeWiele and Edgerton (2016) utilize Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction when examining how middle and upper-middle-class parents intervene and demand better education or higher grades for their children. They note that parents promote social reproduction and inequality when they use their status and/or have the ability to take time to demand better services or grades for their children. When parents make demands of teachers, they exercise power that they feel is appropriate to hold over teachers. Whether the parents feel they know what is best for their child, or they feel that they have paid for the public education (private education may be another matter) of their children through taxes, parents may use their social and economic power to try and persuade teachers to act according to their wishes. Interactions, where parents demand services, are where issues of power and neoliberal ideology may overlap. Parents may exercise their power, knowingly or more likely unknowingly, over teachers when they feel they have greater rights when treated as clients.

Parents' power and authority over teachers may be exercised under circumstances where they are fighting for more resources or demanding services for their children. Deslandes et al. (2015) describe how a "culture of clientelism seems to give more power to parents then they had in the past and to open the door to greater expectations and greater demands on the part of the whole society" (p. 140). Contrarily, parents may hold less power if, for example, they are of lower socio-economic status or have language barriers that may prevent them from advocating or fighting for their child. Some parents may not even realize that they could demand services, since they may be focused on simply providing for their family's basic needs.

When regarding power that teachers may hold, there are various factors, such as cultural capital and social class, as Bourdieu (1990) examined, that may influence whether they hold more or less power over parents. Bourdieu (1990) considered the educational system especially problematic in perpetuating hierarchies. Thus, teachers may even hold more power just because the school is considered their territory or domain. In contrast, Davies and Guppy (2014) examine schooling in close detail and state that, recently, teachers have come under a barrage of complaints from journalists, politicians, and parents that "blame teachers for all sorts of societal ills, such as illiteracy, moral decay, and youth unemployment" (p. 220). They go on to explicate that other professions rarely fall under such scrutiny, but teachers face criticism regardless of research stating that student background is a stronger predictor of issues such as "rising dropout rates or falling test scores" than teacher attributes (p. 220). When faced with blame or criticism, this can lead to teachers feeling powerless as well as the inability to assert their authority as educated professionals (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011).

While there may be an exchange of power between parents and teachers, these power struggles do not have to necessarily be negative or all-encompassing. If power is constantly circulating as Foucault suggests, then the power dynamics in schools will move from parent to teacher depending on the situation or event taking place (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998). Parents and teachers interact on several levels simultaneously, usually under the invisible forces of social class, cultural capital, and other social functions (Bourdieu, 1990). Researchers, such as Epstein (2009) and Hornby (2000), offer models that promote positive parent-teacher interactions. While power may be an over-arching and dominant issue in interactions between parents and teachers, there are many solutions available that could potentially assist both parties to interact positively. The historical image of the teacher as the pinnacle of knowledge has changed in the last few

generations. Interactions between parents and teachers are far more complex nowadays, compared to the past when parents would take a teacher's word as law (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011). Issues of power will always be at play in interactions, but how teachers and parents react to one another will create either a healthy relationship or an adversarial competition.

In review, power is a vast and complex matter. What I offered above is but a snapshot of the issue of power between parents and teachers, and I acknowledge that this is a prodigious topic that deserves deeper exploration. The central point is that the power dynamics between parents and teachers are complex and convoluted at times and that parents may perceive themselves as clients or consumers which may indicate the influence of neoliberal ideology. The section below examines some of the scholarship on engaging parents in school matters.

Parental Engagement in Education

Researchers have ascertained that parental engagement has positive effects on student success (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000, 2011). In this section, I explored how parental involvement affects parent-teacher relationships as well as student success. I also considered the barriers that parents and teachers may face when trying to interact with one another.

Epstein (2001) found that students' grades tend to improve when parents are involved in school matters. Xu and Gulosino (2006) explicate that parental involvement is a better predictor of student achievement than even teacher credentials, which is a compelling finding that illuminates the importance of parents' participation in education. Student achievement linked to parental involvement shows there is certainly a need for schools to continue to encourage parental engagement as a child progresses through their studies.

How can school staff encourage parental engagement and cooperation? Xu and Gulosino (2006) argue that parents participate more often when teachers reach out to parents for support. Their research shows the importance of school staff in creating a welcoming culture to families. Epstein (2010) examines how some teachers and parents believe that school and home are distinctly separate. However, she also illustrates that there are "overlapping spheres of influence" in which parents and teachers must rely on each other to share information and ideas since both will affect the child. Katyal and Evers (2007) also examine the separate spheres of parents and teachers, arguing that parents often take on the role of clients while teachers are service-providers. Although these scholars believe that the client-service provider relationship is not as positive and fruitful as a partnership, Katyal and Evers advise that schools should prioritise engagement at students' homes rather than encouraging parents to come into the schools. Working in isolation may be a futile endeavour, and the impetus for partnership is valuable. The concept of overlapping spheres also shows there may be ways to interact with families on their terms rather than always on the school administrators' and teachers' terms in order to create a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Why, then, do some parents not participate more in their children's education if their involvement could lead to student success? Parents may be uninvolved in school matters for several reasons. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) explicate that parent-teacher interactions, individual parents, family, and broader societal factors contribute to possible disagreements between parents and teachers. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind (2001) act defines and lays out regulations for parental involvement in schools (González & Jackson, 2013; Myers & Myers, 2013). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2017) curriculum documents for elementary subjects also outline parental involvement, stating that it is beneficial for parents to be familiar with the

curriculum and to support school and classroom matters. Myers and Myers (2013) illuminate the downfalls of making parent-teacher interactions government policy. They point out that the policy does not take into consideration the vast backgrounds, beliefs, and various needs of families. The teaching profession also remains a middle-class milieu which can reproduce the values and desire of said class (Lampert, Burnett, & Lebhers, 2016). The interactions between home and school are diverse and ever-changing. The researchers demonstrate the benefits of parent-teacher interactions, but it takes both parties to work cooperatively to arrive at mutual agreements.

There are many obstacles that could interfere with a positive parent-teacher relationship, such as culture, class, language, and disability. Lawson (2003) explains that parents and teachers must work together to try to understand and accept each other's different beliefs in order to work together. McGrath (2007) found in her study that parents and teachers "come to the table with different expectations, knowledge, and needs, but also with a desire to work together" (p. 1420). Therefore, the desire to create a partnership may exist between parents and teachers, but many barriers may prevent connections from being achieved. Endrizzi (2008) believes that teachers and administrators can extend invitations to families to make them aware that school staff want parents to be involved. She realises that there are "deeply ingrained patterns of interactions with families" (p. 181) that may be negative, but it is worth the effort to move slowly into a partnership role.

Poverty is also a barrier to interactions between parents and teachers. Lawson (2003) believes that not all parents are "provided equal access to participation" (p. 80). Other issues such as class struggles, language, culture, and racial divides often hinder parental involvement along with the issue of poverty. Parents may feel helpless or may not even have time to deal with

school matters if they are working multiple jobs or long hours (Adair & Dahlberg, 2003; Apple, 2006). There are instances where teachers may unwittingly perpetuate the stigma of such parents. Teachers' attitudes might also be at play, some feeling perhaps that such parents do not care about their children or their education, when more likely, the parent may be working extra hours to provide financially for their family so that they are unavailable to take time for meetings or worry about homework. Some parents might also feel intimidated by the prospect of going to a school to meet with teachers due to their own history of negative experiences with schooling when they were children. Inability to worry about their child's education or meet with teachers may especially be the case for parents who are working low paying jobs or part-time positions that may not provide sick time or they may find themselves at risk of losing their job if they request time off (Apple, 2006; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). Thus, the very notion of going to schools to meet with teachers might be a practice embedded in middle-class values and privilege. Teachers need to be more sensitive to class, cultural, and language divides that may impede positive interactions (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). While suggesting that teachers become more aware of the potential divides between parents and teachers is a challenging request, considering the predominately middle-class views teachers may hold, it is an important impetus towards greater cooperation and understanding. Parents tend to be involved in school matters more often when they feel welcomed and validated (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000; Šteh & Kalin, 2011).

Šteh and Kalin (2011) examine various models for parent-teacher interactions and state that the optimal model is the partnership model as proposed by Hornby. These scholars agree with Hornby's (2000) assertion that parents and teachers are experts in their own rights. This model suggests that the teacher is the expert on education, while the parent is the expert on their children's habits, likes, and dislikes as well as possible strengths, and weaknesses. Šteh and

Kalin (2011) believe that Hornby's partnership model will result in ongoing involvement because both parents and teachers would work together on mutual goals to support one another.

While bolstering parental involvement may be challenging at times, many researchers believe there are many positives outcomes, such as student achievement as well as the possible creation of partnerships between parents and teachers (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000; Šteh & Kalin, 2011). In the next section, I examined parent-teaching interactions more closely and regard various models and suggestions on how to create more positive interactions, as well as potential barriers that may impede these interactions.

Parent-Teacher Interactions

Notwithstanding the class barriers that I discussed above, parental engagement is not only a major factor in student success but also in positive parent-teacher interactions. While much of the time, interactions between parents and teachers are positive, negative exchanges can arise. The following discussion explores ways in which parents and teachers can better work together.

Most teachers, administrators, and parents strive for positive interactions despite family issues and government policy constraints (Endrizzi, 2008). Parents and teachers are likely to have different values and beliefs (Keyes, 2002) and with encroaching globalisation and ease of mobility, neighbourhoods can be more diverse and less homogenous. Alternately, some neighbourhoods and schools face "ghettoisation" with declining employment and rising house prices (Connolly, 2016; Perkins, 2015). Perkins (2015) also argues that schooling in the United States can perpetuate ghettoisation of neighbourhoods by maintaining a colonial stronghold over the vulnerable residents of the so-called ghetto. Therefore, parents and teachers may have to work at finding common ground and mutual respect with a focus on student achievement.

Researchers have studied how to make parent-teacher interactions more positive. Such scholarship focuses on a broad range of issues, from various models on how to interact (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000) to home visits (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Smith, Fry, & Fisher, 2015) to invitations to interact in schools, (Endrizzi, 2008) to technological solutions (Graham-Clay, 2005; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). Some research shows the merits of home visits and how they can have a powerful impact on student engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Smith, Fry, & Fisher, 2015). Smith, Fry, and Fisher (2015) advise that home visits should be conducted in pairs for safety reasons, be voluntary, and focus on fostering relationships rather than academics. Unfortunately, teachers barely have time to make individual phone calls, let alone make individual visits (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011).

Regarding technological solutions, Grundmeyer and Yankey (2016) propose using technology to allow parents to view teachers' comments at their leisure without having to deal with childcare or taking time off work. Teachers can film themselves commenting on individual students and send a video to the parents. It could be argued that recording interviews replace the traditional meeting, but it may be more likely that teachers spend time editing and rerecording videos. Grundmeyer and Yankey (2016) explicate that teachers were able to record easily after a few first stumbles, but as previously stated, teachers do not have much extra time in a work day, so this may also be problematic. Graham-Clay (2005) endorses the benefits of various technological aids to communication, but face to face meetings cannot be discounted when it comes to fostering relationships. The ability for parents to respond immediately during conversations is lost when they are offered recordings of teachers. Furthermore, in Grundmeyer and Yankey's (2016) study, teachers commented on how many parents did not often respond with follow-up comments or questions to the recordings. If technology were to aid in parent-

teacher meetings, perhaps a live and interactive format should be explored, such as Skype or Zoom, when face-to-face meetings are not possible. Teachers should also consider that some parents may not have access to technology at home (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011).

Aslan's (2016) research on teachers' perspectives shows that negative parent interactions can adversely affect teachers. These negative interactions could lead teachers to take more of an adversarial approach in which some might avoid parent contact whenever possible (Endrizzi, 2008). Therefore, the ultimate goal for some researchers (such as Endrizzi, 2008; Epstein, 2001; Hornby, 2000) is to find a way for equal collaboration, where both parents and teachers are valued for their input. Endrizzi explores three models of parent and teacher interactions: avoidance, dependency, and mutualism. The author explains these models from both the teachers' and parents' perspectives as well as the behaviours indicative of each model. With the avoidance model, parents and teachers blame one another and only have discussions when absolutely necessary. In regard to the dependent model, teachers believe they have to educate the parents, and parents feel teachers should fix their child. Finally, the mutual model has families and teachers learning and working together. Endrizzi's model of mutualism is similar to Hornby's (2000) partnership model, in which parents and teachers should strive to work together to make decisions as well as work towards mutual support when interacting.

Endrizzi (2008) believes that her mutualism model could be transformative to interactions between home and school. She believes that life and learning through school, home, and community are inextricably intertwined. Endrizzi's model is also similar to Epstein's (2010) belief that schools are seen as a homeland, which invites "power-sharing" between families and teachers in a mutually respective environment. Including parents in school matters may be difficult for some teachers who prefer to work without parental influence, but it may be a

worthwhile effort for schools to implement partnership models in order to improve interactions between parents and teachers. Epstein (2010) realises that the move towards this type of interaction may take time. Therefore, she suggests that teachers plan manageable steps to reach the final partnership stage. She also states, "In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more family-like schools" (p. 83). Therefore, when school staff welcome parents as part of a team, families may be more likely to engage in interactive ways.

Another concern is the unforeseeable disputes between parents and teachers. Deslandes et al., (2015) believe that there will always be obstacles between parents and teachers that may complicate day-to-day communication and be difficult to overcome. Parents who behave as clients may even exacerbate a separation by creating animosity between parents and teachers. This client disposition may entail a parent demanding a service, or perhaps they may be insistent on changing or manipulating grades because they believe their child deserves a higher grade. Deslandes et al., (2015) found that teachers feel isolation and mistrust when they work with parents who try to make such demands, rather than working in more of a partnership. The researchers make a pertinent point when they say that parents and teachers will be confronted continuously with changing dynamics of family life and societal influences. The "culture of clientelism" is quickly becoming predominant in public school settings when parents demand services from educators (Deslandes et al., 2015, p. 140). Teachers need to work with effective principals who help to create a culture of partnership rather than placating parents when they behave as clients.

Under neoliberal influence, parents may demand a choice of schools, that teachers change lessons, and often will not show trust in teachers' professional judgment (Baltodano, 2012; Deslandes et al., 2015). Parents who behave as clients tend to approach administrators first, with

their concerns, rather than contacting the teacher directly, as found by Deslandes, Barma, and

Morin (2015). They state that principals should direct parents to communicate first with the

classroom teacher and if they do have to get involved, to support the teacher if the parents lay

blame on the educator (Deslandes et al., 2015).

In sum, interactions between home and school are a continual effort on both sides.

Neoliberal ideals may compromise trust between parents and teachers when individualism and

standardisation are the focus of schooling (Endrizzi, 2008; Giroux, 2016). The practice of

systematically weakening the education system through education policies may lead parents to

see teachers at fault for problems within the classroom (Baltodano, 2012; Connell, 2013; Giroux,

2015; McMurtry, 1991). However, in order to develop partnerships and respect, trust needs to be

built between parents and teachers (Endrizzi, 2008; Epstein, 2010). It takes time to build trust,

but Šteh and Kalin (2011) assert that it is essential to building relationships to improve

cooperation. The teacher may work at being accommodating and open, while parents may work

at trusting the teacher and communicating in non-confrontational manners. To encourage more

participation, the researchers recommend that teachers continue to work on communication and

organisational skills.

As stated above, principals can play a vital role in supporting parent-teacher interactions

and for dealing with parents who demand services. Next, I explored how leadership and training

can aid teachers to pre-emptively communicate with parents, as well as diffuse negative

situations.

Leadership, Administrative Support, and Training

Strong leadership from administrators is essential for encouraging both teachers and

parents to create healthy relationships and for their support of teacher training (Esquivel et al.,

2008; Epstein, 2011; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). Principals play an important role in facilitating initial parent-teacher communications and navigating disagreements. Many teachers require support to maintain a positive school culture that values open communication and continued participation of parents. Epstein (2011) discusses the importance of administrators and district leaders to promote positive interactions, acknowledge the various needs of parents and students who represent a diversity of communities and work within budget constraints. According to Epstein (2005), school leaders can promote positive relationships by providing in-service training that supports positive interactions between parents and teachers. Principals may request that teachers communicate with parents early in their first weeks back to school, or they may set up evening learning sessions to bridge the community and school interactions. Mueller, Singer, and Draper (2008) concur, explaining that positive and strong leadership is essential to drive change. Therefore, strong administrative leadership is necessary to have a healthy and supportive school community.

When administrators do not support teachers, often a breakdown of communication occurs, leading teachers to feel they need to placate parents as well as principals (Aslan, 2016). Mueller et al. (2008) note that participants in their study listed lack of leadership as their biggest complaint. During interviews with teachers and parents, they discovered that parents who complained got what they wanted, unlike those who did not. Parents who do not have the tools to support their child, or feel they do not have the power to make a change, may have less of a chance to resolve an issue with teachers (Lareau, Weininger, & Cox, 2018). Parents who maintain a client approach to their interactions with teachers may demand services and press for changes that may not be appropriate (Deslandes et al., 2015).

An unsupportive principal could lead to many troubles, not only with parents but also with following the policies in education acts, which are bound by law (Mueller et al., 2008). Knowledgeable and supportive administrators should be the pillar of strength in a school and the neighbouring communities (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011). Teachers and parents should find support during times of need and know that there will be a fair and diplomatic process wherein principals should demonstrate consistency in their leadership and decision-making (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Perkins, 2015). Administrators can act as mediators and negotiators during conflicts between parents and teachers (Hammons, 2017).

Another facet that may hinder teacher-principal interactions is neoliberal ideology that influences government policies and mandates. Often administrators promote neoliberal ideals on teachers through provincial mandates to improve qualifications and job readiness for students (Perkins, 2015). While these sound like reasonable qualities to promote, educators tend to suffer through standardisation and many lack knowledge about critical pedagogy (Preston & Aslett, 2014). Giroux (2011) believes critical pedagogy is essential to democratic education because critical pedagogy values the critique and examination of dominant values, institutions, and relations. Vassallo (2013) elucidates that when school district leaders and administrators advocate for standardisation, students tend to become more focused on the self and their own personal value. He further states that neoliberal ideals promote the homogenization of schools and more government or marketplace control. While educational leaders and administrators may not be aware of neoliberal ideology as a concept, they may inadvertently endorse marketplace values when they enforce policies and procedures that position parents as clients and teachers as

service providers. Thus, neoliberal ideology may undermine interactions that might otherwise be harmonious and respectful by shaping them through marketplace values and interests.

Additionally, when principals are faced with parents who behave with a forceful client mentality and who feel entitled to control their children's education, the reaction of the administrators to these confrontations is critical. Landeros (2011) explores the issue of mothers who behave like clients and explicates that when administrators do not intervene in power struggles between parents and teachers, it alters the "power hierarchy of the school away from educators to the favour of parents" (p. 261). Although there are many ways for parents and teachers to interact positively, teachers may be subjected to additional stress while trying to maintain their authority within the classroom when they are challenged by parents who feel they can make demands (Deslandes et al., 2015; Inglis, 2012).

Teachers and administrators may comply with neoliberal ideals unknowingly and perhaps under the pressure of the district and government, particularly with matters such as cost savings and streamlining for their schools. When neoliberal constraints and ideals circulate through policies and procedures, Connell (2013) states that principals are now more like "managers who control a budget, hire and fire staff, attract corporate funding, market their product through advertizing and so on" (p. 107). While Canadian administrators are not under pressure to find funding and attract parents to enrol their children, in the United States, these issues are more prevalent. Malsbary (2016) argues that principals in the United States are now under exceeding pressure to raise test scores since their budgets are so closely tied to student achievement under the No Child Left Behind (2001) act. Vassallo (2013) discusses how administrators often stress the maximal use of instructional time in order to prepare students for standardised testing, which

will reduce the time to cover other subjects and could create disinterest in students towards school subjects.

As a pre-emptive strategy, training teachers on how to interact positively with parents may help to prepare teachers to work with parents, including how to react when an issue arises. Epstein's (2005) article on professional development explains the value of pre-service and in-service training for teachers to learn about conflict resolution. However, Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2002) and Morris and Taylor (1998) recognise that there are not many of these kinds of pre-service courses available for students who are training to become teachers. While the ability to work effectively with parents is an essential skill, conflict resolution and creating relationships with parents are rarely offered as content in teacher education courses or in-service training, whether as a stand-alone course or as part of a class (Morris & Taylor, 1998). As previously stated, Šteh and Kalin (2011) recommend that teachers should be trained to improve communication skills to work with parents effectively. The authors contend that listening and assertive skills are especially important when communicating with families. These researchers praise the benefits of teacher training to foster effective communication between parents and teachers. It would be beneficial for universities in Western countries to begin offering these types of courses to support teachers and administrators to create and maintain positive relationships with parents since such courses are not often offered at universities (Morris & Taylor, 1998).

In summary, it is problematic for teachers to work with parents if principals are not supportive of teachers. When administrators, at the behest of school boards and ministries of education, enforce neoliberal practices of standardisation and individualism, teachers may not be able to resist the imposition of these ideals when ideology becomes school rules or policies.

Given that neoliberal ideology is, as it were, "in the air," it is reasonable to suggest that most teachers would endorse such practices of standardization and individualism, further entrenching neoliberal ideals. Stein (2013) elucidates that "outcomes on standardized tests, expressed in numerical terms, have become the ultimate and, in some cases, the only indicators of success" in education (p. 1). When an ideological framework operates as normative, and thus, difficult to "see," administrators are likely not able to resist it even if they understand "neoliberal ideology" as a concept in the first place. Do teachers educate children to simply gain employment, or is there deeper learning and socialisation that go beyond finding occupations? Such a question gives rise to a broader philosophical one, which is: What is the purpose of education? Tackling the question of purpose is beyond the scope of my research. However, it serves to briefly discuss how neoliberal ideology provides a foundation on which certain beliefs about the purposes of education are based. Those purposes, specifically, are that education serves the marketplace and provides students with employable skills to enter the workforce. Developing civic and political awareness thus becomes secondary. When neoliberal ideals influence policies, fierce competition and the quest for jobs may be more important than intellectual growth and community engagement. Teachers operating under the influence of neoliberal ideology, especially those who are unaware of these influences, will be expeditors for employment rather than facilitators who instil a desire to learn and inspire curiosity in various subject matters. Principals play a pivotal role in supporting both parents and teachers in their interactions and by advocating for teachers to receive more training for promoting positive communication and interactions with parents.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the scholarship on the complex human interactions between parents and teachers, with a particular focus on power dynamics and neoliberal

influences. While most researchers, such as Deslandes et al. (2015), contend that there will always be complications and new challenges when working with parents and teachers, there are others, such as Epstein (2001), who believe that there are ways to support and pre-emptively reach out to create positive interactions. Power dynamics will perpetually circulate between parents and teachers and ever-fluctuating family dynamics, and ever-changing societal demands will require both parents and teachers to adapt to new situations continually.

School administrators also have an important role to play in encouraging effective parent-teacher interactions. The position of principals on neoliberal ideology may also affect the school culture, teacher well-being, and even parent-teacher interactions. Teachers benefit when principals offer support, rather than making demands of teachers. Offering training to pre-service and in-service teachers could be another important step towards more positive parent-teacher interactions.

Neoliberal ideology has become a prevalent influence upon schools in part because of provincial and state governments that have a propensity to support standardisation, privatisation, and control of education. While parents should have the right to interact with teachers and be involved in their children's education, parents who demand and force their desired requirements for their children's education on teachers may hinder the education process and the relationship with their children's teacher.

In Chapter Four, I regard the positive and negative interactions participants have with their children's teachers. I also examined the interviews for where neoliberal ideology may have shaped these interactions. I further consider how power may also play a part in marketplace values as well as the cultural capital that some parents may hold (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016; Lareau et al., 2018; Vincent & Martin, 2002). In advance of Chapter Four, I offer a

discussion in the next chapter on methodology and the steps I took to conduct the data collection

and analysis.

Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

"We know not through our intellect but through our experience."

– Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Methodology

To reiterate from Chapter One, my research explored the question: How might neoliberal ideology shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-perceived role in the schools of their children? The question led me to examine how neoliberal ideology shapes the ways that parents behave with teachers, how parents perceive their role in schools, and if they believe they are clients of the education system. Using neoliberal ideology as a guiding concept to explore its possible influence on parent-teacher relationships, I employed a phenomenological approach to inform my study and explore my research question. Creswell (2014) explains phenomenology as an inquiry considering the "lived experiences" of participants (p. 14). In phenomenology, Detmer (2013) illustrates how phenomena relate to one's perception, which is often guided by values. He further explicates that individuals are constantly confronted with "the value quality of things, actions, and states of affair," and one must decide what they believe or perceive to be good or bad, important, not important, or even "wonderful, disgusting, outrageous, [or] admirable" (p. 168).

The phenomena of parent-teacher interactions are worthy of investigation since, at times, these exchanges can become contentious. The experiences and perceptions of parents may give insight into why they may behave like clients who are entitled to services for their children. My research explored the participants' experiences with parent-teacher interactions, which means I examined the parents' lived experiences within the education setting. Doing so allowed me to regard individual parent's encounters and thoughts on their interactions with teachers. Each

parent brought a unique perspective as well as their own social reality to my research. While I was only able to obtain a small number of participants, I feel like their stories and replies gave me insightful glimpses into their thoughts on how they experience interactions with teachers.

McGowan (2013) states that phenomenology extols experience and desires to seek truth and to examine experience as plainly and honestly as possible. Deconstructing someone's recollection may prove challenging since experience can be muddled by past incidents, personalities, and perception (McGowan, 2013). While perhaps challenging, using phenomenology allows researchers to take each encounter and examine it for what it is; the individual's perception of events. It may not be possible to separate an individual's experience from researchers' subjectivities, but the phenomenological perspective requires researchers to consider both objective and subjective viewpoints (Detmer, 2013).

Käufer and Chemero (2015) describe how phenomenology seeks to "explain the meaning of our experiences" (p. 32). They elucidate that Husserl, one of the early theorists of phenomenology, believed that "all experiences that bear some meaning are conscious, and therefore phenomenology focuses on conscious events" (p. 32). The extremely positive and negative events between parents and teachers will likely be poignant for parents, which allows for conscious and memorable events which can be shared lucidly.

Phenomenology allows researchers to explore the experiences of the individual as they themselves present it. While I situated myself in the study as a researcher, I also acknowledge my experiences as a teacher and as a parent. Using phenomenology to inform my study allowed for the exploration of parents' experiences, which I considered openly and impartially. The use of semi-structured interviews permitted participants to aid in the shaping of the conversation,

which also allowed interviews to seem more like an informal conversation (Vincent, 1996). I examined the experiences of parents through the use of semi-structured interviews.

Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

To explore the question that guides my research, I conducted open-ended interviews with parents, one-on-one. A semi-structured format allowed for relevant topics to emerge that I could not anticipate and the ability to probe with further questions. An open-ended approach allows for flexibility in eliciting richer detail that a closed interview format may not. Using the format of semi-structured interviews allowed me to examine the lived experiences shared by the parents as required for the phenomenological perspective. I compiled the views from parents by prompting them to answer questions in a detailed manner about their encounters with teachers (Creswell, 2014).

Seidman (2006) suggests a three-part phenomenological interview process with the first part being a review of life history, the second part being a detailing of experience, and the third part being a reflection on meaning. Due to time constraints, I was not able to complete the three-part process on separate dates as he suggests, but instead, I used parts of his methods during my interview process. During the interviews, I discussed past experiences with parents, had them expound on the details of at least one negative experience, and one positive experience, and finally, I had them reflect on the meaning of their experiences.

Phenomenology employed in the context of my research allowed for an exploration of each parent's individual experience with teachers. On the matter of analysing interview data, Jackson (2002) advises that researchers use 'bracketing' to expose and present possible biases that may affect researchers' interpretations. Bracketing is the practice of researchers regarding their own biases or beliefs and attempting to put them aside when regarding their research

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The use of bracketing could also operate by limiting researchers from swaying or leading participants (Jackson, 2002). Hesse-Beiber and Leavy (2006) argue that 'bracketing' does not allow researchers to put aside their biases, but instead allows them to view and account for differences that may arise in their interviews. Jackson and Hesse-Beiber and Leavy encourage an examination of possible biases and values that may affect interpretation, but these realisations should help dissect the interview rather than conform it to researchers' own beliefs and judgements. All considered, researchers should attempt to portray the image of someone who is free of judgement during interviews or at least distance themselves by holding back personal beliefs or values during the interview process (Hesse-Beiber & Leavy, 2006).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed me to obtain detailed responses as well as the ability to have participants clarify comments (Jackson, 2002). I also used neutral phrases, such as "could you please elaborate", "can you describe a typical interaction with the teacher" or "can you describe a negative experience with a teacher that you encountered", as much as possible. Using neutral words or questions allowed parents to communicate their experiences without being overly directed (Creswell, 2014). While neutral phrases were beneficial in the interviews that I conducted, I aimed to direct participants to examine their behaviour and thoughts without having them feel that I was judging their responses. In the next two sections, I listed the interview questions and explain how I recruited participants.

Interview Questions

Questions I asked parents include:

- How would you describe, overall, your experiences with teachers?

- Can you identify experiences that involved conflict?

- How were they resolved?

- Can you identify experiences that felt positive to you?

- What made you feel positive about them?

- What do you believe are the main purposes of education?

- What do you hope your children will get out of education?

- What is the benefit of having your children in school?

- What do you believe your role is in your children's education?

- One of the issues at school is that some parents feel they are a consumer or client. What do you think of those ideas? How do you see yourself in this picture?

These questions were collectively designed to aid in illuminating possible incidences where neoliberal ideology may be an influencing factor. I narrowed down the questions to ten, due to time constraints as well as to allow for follow up or clarifying questions.

Participant Recruitment

Between December 2017 and January 2018, I interviewed six women to discuss their experiences with parent-teacher interactions. To recruit participants, I placed an ad on social media, as well as through word of mouth. I did not specify that I was only looking for women, but, as it turned out, only women responded to my advertisement (See Appendix A: Advertisement Looking for Participants through Social Media). I used the non-probability convenience sampling strategy due to time, availability, and budget constraints (Flick, 2009; Iratzoqui & Cohn, 2014). On social media, I posted a public message that had the potential to reach parents when shared by other social media users. In my message, I requested that potential recruits or people who had recruits in mind, private message me to ensure confidentially of each potential participant. While I did not directly request geographical and social locations of the

participants, I discerned them all to be socially located as white, working-class and middle-class women and Canadian residents.

I conducted a face-to-face interview with one participant, and the rest were video conference interviews. All of the interviews were guided by an open-ended, semi-structured interview format. The conversations were also conducted in private rooms to ensure the confidentiality of the participant. Prior to beginning the recording, I described my research and made small talk in order to establish rapport and ensure the participant was comfortable and at ease. I requested that each participant choose a pseudonym or that one would be chosen for them (Creswell, 2014).

I recruited parents who have at least one child enrolled in primary grades, specifically students in grade 1-8, and have had at least one negative and one positive interaction with a teacher. Having both positive and negative interactions allowed me to explore the various aspects of the self-perceived roles of parents in education. A positive interaction may have resulted in a parent wanting to write a thank you note to the teacher or the like. A negative interaction may have led to including administrators in meetings as a mediator, for example. I examined the negative interactions to see if neoliberal ideology has influenced these interactions. See Appendix B for Letter of Information for Potential Participants and Appendix C for the Description of Research and Consent Form.

Data Collection

With the verbal and written permission of each participant, I recorded interviews on a portable recording device and took notes regarding participants' facial expressions and body language. These notes allowed me to interpret participants' mood as well as possible use of sarcasm or humour. I transcribed each interview verbatim with the use of VLC software

(VideoLan Organization, 1991). I emailed the transcripts to five of the six participants, who acknowledged they would participate in member checking, in order to have them verify its accuracy. A copy of all transcripts and recordings will be stored electronically for a five-year period, as per the Lakehead Research Ethics Board regulations.

Data Analysis

To analyse data, Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele (2012) encourage qualitative researchers to organise an "initial coding", then create a "higher order coding" in order to complete the analysis of the research (p. 331). To code the interviews, I examined the transcripts for similarities and patterns that emerged in each interview. Creswell (2014) describes how coding is a means of organising data into categories that assist with analysing the research. I took notes of each interview, which I used to discern similarities and contrasts. I played the audio recordings numerous times to listen for themes within each interview. I identified the codes by using one-word or one sentence descriptors with the use of Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2018).

Creswell (2014) explicates that qualitative researchers use both inductive and deductive analysis throughout the research process. According to him, inductive reasoning allows researchers to work "back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher has established a comprehensive set of themes" while deductive reasoning assists the researchers as the analysis progresses (p. 186). Codes and themes emerged from my analysis of the data throughout deductive and inductive processes.

Using Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2018), I created nine codes and three groups along with highlighting many possible quotes. The codes were communication, conflict, demanding, negative interactions, neoliberal ideology, parents, partner, positive

interactions, and service. The three groups created were positive parent-teacher interactions, negative parent-teacher interactions, and indications of neoliberal ideology. I explored these in detail in the next chapter. In the next section, I examine possible limitations to my research.

Possible Limitations

Creswell (2014) explicates that qualitative researchers should work to understand the meaning of participants with the data the researcher collected through various methods of inquiry. He further expounds that "qualitative research is interpretive research", meaning that researchers must use a variety of strategies to ensure a reduction of bias and an awareness of a plethora of influences on their subjects (p. 187). I disclosed in my research that I was once a teacher who experienced negative dealings with parents. I do not believe these experiences hampered my ability to interpret and discuss parents' thoughts and behaviours. Conversely, my experiences as both a teacher and a parent further strengthened my study. I was able to design an interview based on shared experiences as well as enhance my ability to build a rapport with participants. I aimed to hear and listen to the parents' perspectives and to explore how neoliberal ideology may influence interactions between parents and teachers.

While one possible limitation is that previous experiences may affect my judgment and exploration of some matters while not considering others, but as previously stated, I believe my experiences as a teacher and parent enhance the study. As a former teacher, I concede to already established or preconceived notions or bias I may have. Anderson-Meger (2016) states that "everyone is biased. Period." and that "research and theory are processes that help us move beyond our biases" (p. 4). Therefore, I stand behind the process, the research, and the guiding concept of neoliberalism to strengthen and support my analysis and study.

Another possible limitation is that I did not unpack neoliberalism with my participants. Were I to redo this study, I would have taken the time to discuss neoliberal ideology, so the parents may have had a clearer understanding of the ideology I was using as a guiding concept. This knowledge may have led my participants to have a deeper conversation and perhaps be able to answer my questions more fully in light of their understanding of neoliberal ideology. Conversely, it was perhaps beneficial that the parents had no previous knowledge of neoliberal ideology because I was able to examine the effects on parent-teacher interactions without having parents directly aware of its influence. Some of the literature I examined presents neoliberal ideology as invisible or as doxa (Chopra, 2003; Patrick, 2013), which means that parents may be affected by neoliberal ideology and its effects without their immediate knowledge.

An additional limitation is that I had a very small sample size with limited information on geographical and socio-economic status, which may have left a gap in the understanding of the data that was collected for the study. At the time of searching for participants, I did not consider the necessity of this information, nor could I predict that it could potentially strengthen my conclusions. However, with the information I did collect, I was able to draw conclusions on how the participants felt about their interactions with teachers despite difficult situations and family hardships. In hindsight, I would have delved deeper to examine the significance of the parents having children with autism or behaviour disorders, but due to time and length of the thesis, it was not considered at this time. I also sought parents that had one good experience and one bad experience, but it could have been that parents with very negative experiences would be the only ones to respond to the study.

One final limitation may be that employing phenomenology means that I derived my analysis from individuals' experiences, which can be influenced by memory, mood, personality,

and even from prior experiences (McGowan, 2013). These influences can mean that there may be exaggerations or details missing from the answers collected. I have also shortened steps, as previously stated in my method's section, due to lack of time and resources. In order to delve deep into a person's experience using Seidman's (2006) three-part phenomenological method, I would need more time to discuss and explore with my participants. In the end, I am satisfied with the employment of phenomenology to inform my study, as I was able to reflect on each individual experience. The existing scholarship that I discussed in Chapter Two and the methodology I employed helped to expand my field of understanding, as well as my interpretations of the functions of the social world.

Ethics

My research involved human participants, meaning that I required permission from the University to conduct the study. Thus, I applied and was successful in receiving ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Lakehead University. Guided by Creswell (2014), I recruited participants who were able to participate willingly, were parents of a child or children aged six to thirteen who are currently enrolled in a public or private school. I had participants sign two consent forms, so we could both retain a copy. Before the interview, I reminded participants of their rights to answer, or not answer any question and their power to stop the interview at any time. Participants were encouraged to choose a pseudonym, or one was chosen for them to protect anonymity (Creswell, 2014). Once I completed the transcripts, I emailed individual interviews to each participant, and they had the chance to verify its accuracy. Five of the six participants requested to participate in member checking of the interviews. I have stored the data on a password-protected computer to ensure the continued anonymity of participants. I

provided participants with access to my findings and research if they requested it on their

consent form.

In the next section, I explored and analysed the data from my interviews. I discussed the

three that resulted from coding with Atlas.ti, which are positive parent-teacher interactions,

negative parent-teacher interactions, and indications of neoliberal ideology.

Assumptions of the Research

While there was a concerted effort to examine Canadian literature, I drew from a lot of

American data. Canada and the United States have very different forms and outlooks on

education. I attempted to use the data appropriately, but I want readers to be aware how Canada

is not as driven by competition to attract parents to enrol their children or by funding.

I have taken graduate courses to learn how to research as well as learn to write academic

research. I assume that reader knows that I have completed my graduate course work before

completing my thesis research and writing.

I assume that my participants answered honestly, knowing that I was ensuring anonymity.

I also assume that my participants participated freely, willingly, and out of their own interest

because I did not offer any gift or monetary exchange.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Interviews with Parents – Exploring Needs and Roles

"Maybe stories are just data with a soul."

– Brené Brown

In this chapter, I analyse the data accumulated from the six interviews that I conducted in December 2017 through to January 2018. The questions asked of parents highlighted positive and negative interactions with teachers, their perception of their roles in education, and their thoughts on marketplace values around education. The parents spoke about difficult interactions where teachers and administrators were unwilling to compromise, situations where they knew there would be no resolution in the end, and the hardships some of the parents had when trying to ensure their child with special needs had their needs met. Although I did not recruit specifically for parents with children with special needs, more than half of the participants reported having a child with autism or with possible behaviour issues. Responses to my questions varied, but the one answer that most participants echoed was that they experienced more positive interactions than negative. These positive responses are a hopeful message that even during difficult conversations with teachers, parents can, nevertheless, view their experiences with teachers as more positive than negative.

I narrowed the data collected from interviews down to nine codes using the computer program Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2018). The codes are communication, conflict, demanding, negative interactions, neoliberal ideology, parents, partner, positive interactions, and service. I then sorted these codes into three groups which are positive parent-teacher interactions, negative parent-teacher interactions, and indications of the influence of neoliberal ideology (See table 1). These groupings allowed me to observe codes that overlap and contradict, which led me to the questions and insights that I explore in the paragraphs below.

Table 1.

Codes and groups collected from interviews

Groups	Positive Parent-Teacher Interaction	Negative Parent-Teacher Interactions	Indication of the Influence of Neoliberalism
Codes	Communicate	Conflict	Neoliberal ideology
	Parents	Parents	Service
	Partners	Demanding	Demanding
	Positive Interaction	Negative Interactions	

Positive Parent-Teacher Interactions

Most of the parents I interviewed explained that the majority of their experiences with teachers were positive. Most of the comments from the interviewees reflected not only on how they felt, but how the teacher made their child feel. I discerned that these parents believe that the way teachers treat their children is maybe more important than the learning they do in class. They highlighted several events that were especially poignant and why they felt positive about them. Amy, for instance, stated that:

Somebody took the time to understand what it takes for my son to bloom, to be happy, and thrive. And because he felt so comfortable, happy, and carefree in class, I am sure he was able to learn more.

Another, Carol, shared these thoughts:

[The teacher] got a much more positive response from them because he had established that kind of a relationship. I think that is probably true about all of us. Establish a good relationship with someone, if they then have to ask you to do something you don't want to do, you are more inclined to do that, because you feel a connection, whereas if its, I am

just going to fight you from day one to make you be who I want you to be, but you're not

that person, then you are not that person, then that's not really ever going to work.

These comments show that the connections that teachers make with their students and parents

have a significant impact. One could say that parents may trust teachers more when they feel that

the teacher has a connection with their child. When students and parents feel heard and

welcomed, it seems reasonable to suggest that interactions between teachers and parents will be

more positive.

Communication was also an essential factor in the positive experiences of the parents I

interviewed. More than half of the parents discussed higher needs for their children, so

communication was important to ensure that their child was integrating well in school and on a

path for learning. Liz commented:

I felt heard, and I felt that they were really working towards the child's best interest as

opposed to a kind of their own interests. I know there has to be a line because teachers

are human. It's a job, and they are expected to do way too much. But some of them are

definitely better at their job than others.

The comment above shows how Liz is aware that teachers cannot do everything but hopes to

have teachers communicate regularly with her. When a parent has a child with a disability or a

learning difference, there may be a need for more frequent and candid feedback. The needs of the

children of the parents I interviewed range from autism to potential behavioural issues. Sheila

described how communicating with the teacher helped them overcome hurdles with her son:

We talked it out. I talked it out with [my son] and let him know what was going on. I

talked to the teacher too saying 'well, he doesn't have friends. So that is the reason why

he is acting out. Can we include him in other things with other kids? Try to get them to

socialise together. I am not there, so it's hard for me to see what is going on.' So that is

how that situation was resolved.

All these comments show the positive response from parents when teachers take the time to

communicate with parents. Participants indicated how positive communications led to their

children's positive experience with education. Sara commented on how communication led to

helping her son feel better about school:

It was nice to have people get him. It's all new territory for us. All kids are really

different. He is a really different learner from our daughter. So, it was nice, it felt positive

because it felt like they actually wanted him to be there. And it wasn't 'ok; behaviours

are all here, let see what we can do just to get through the year, so we can move on and

get rid of him' kind of situation. That felt good. He felt like he wanted to be there too.

When communication is consistent and flowing between parents and teachers, it may lead to

greater educational and social outcomes. If communication along with how the teachers treat

students lead to positive experiences, what do the parents believe the purpose of education to be?

When the participants were asked to explain the purposes of education and what they hoped their

children would get out of school, some parents were stumped, but the majority of the participants

took time to reflect on this question.

Carol believes there needs to be a significant shift in education because she feels "that

education is about 20 years behind where these kids currently are as far as what they need to

know" while Nicole stated that she believes education "is to set you up for future life skills". She

expounded:

That is basically the purpose of education is to give you a base. To be able to be a

productive member of society when you are done. Whether you chose to further your

education and go to college or university or whether you chose to enter the workforce

right away. I believe it gives you a base, I guess, for life.

Sheila concurred, saying that the purpose of education is "to secure their future". Sara also

agreed when she stated that students should "get the basics, work on those reading, writing,

arithmetic kind of old school kind of thoughts". However, conversely, she stated that:

I also think that within the school, that the education system, they are there a lot of the

time and they need to feel like they are wanted to be there. That they belong, and they

have a purpose to be there and not just show up and do reading, writing and arithmetic.

To have that sense of community. I think it is important for them.

The comments above show that there is a consensus among the participants that education is a

base for their children to become productive members of society. When reflecting on what they

hoped their children would get out of education, they indicated, much like Sheila, that students

need an education "to secure their future" but also, as Nicole stated, education should instil a

"love of learning".

The interviews indicate that there may be benefits when parents and teachers

communicate consistently. Perhaps interactions will thrive when consistent interactions could

lead to goal sharing and may lead to both parties similar understanding of events or specific

items such as homework, incidents at school, and/or daily plans for students with specific needs.

The parents I interviewed were more confident and content with events when communication

happened between themselves and the teacher.

Another theme was socialization, and all of the participants expressed that they believe

that socialisation is an essential facet of education from which their children will benefit. Each

one of them believes the daily interactions students have at school will help them learn to work with others and realise different ways and points of view. Sara, for instance, stated that:

> I think they are learning a lot about social interactions. It's not always good. There is good and bad in those. You have to take the time to figure those out too. They learn a lot from the bad ones. As much as they do the good ones.

Nicole also explained:

> I think it's good for the social interactions. As well as they learn to be taught in an institutional setting. I mean, as an employee, you are going to have a boss. Someone is going to tell you what to do besides mom and dad. But I think that that is part of it. It is good for the social interactions with the other children, and you learn to deal with different personalities which helps you for the workforce. You have someone telling you beside your mom and dad what to do so then you learn that you have to listen as you get older to your boss or what have you, other coworkers.

In review, the participants elaborated on experiences that made them feel welcomed and how their participation was validated. These parents felt positive when their children were treated with love and kindness but especially when open lines of communication were created between themselves and the teacher. The positive experiences the participants shared, showed that communication would aid the socialisation, basic education, and the general happiness of their children. In considering neoliberal ideology, perhaps marketplace values have less of a hold on parents than some research has shown (see Landeros, 2011). If parents feel they are content with the services provided and feel that they have mostly positive interactions with parents, perhaps marketplace values have less of an influence on parents than the literature explored has demonstrated.

One can assume that misunderstandings and miscommunication could lead to tumultuous interactions between parents and teachers while positive and consistent interactions can lead to supportive and purposeful interactions. The responses to the interview questions have shown that these participants have had mostly positive experiences with teachers, although, when given a chance to speak about negative interactions, the answers tended to be a lot more lengthy. This insight leads to the discussion of negative interactions, which I explored below.

Negative Parent-Teacher Interactions

While the participants stressed that the majority of their experiences were positive, negative experiences were discussed with significantly more detail during the interviews. Striving to discern the essence of the parents' experiences during the interviews, I encouraged parents to elaborate on their experiences with teachers and the discussion on negative interactions was more impassioned and detailed. The parents spoke of specific instances that they interpreted as negative, which gave the impression of incidents that may have been based on miscommunication and/or personality conflict.

I discussed in the previous section how communication between parents and teachers could lead to positive interactions. Here, I focus on how lack of communication or miscommunication can lead to negative interactions. One participant, Liz, discussed how the longer her children were in school, the less she felt like she is able to communicate with teachers:

> I find the older they are; they will humour parents a bit more when their kids are younger, but then they kind of view it as more of an intrusion. I understand that they are super overworked and busy and it's hard to see everyone. I just find that in general the school aren't really welcoming of parents.

Carole also commented:

> I have walked away thinking it was a waste of my time, they didn't really take into
> consideration any of my suggestions, and I have sat in parent-teacher interviews and have
> said that you must do this, this, this, and this if you want [my daughter] to cooperate. And
> I have walked out thinking, you are not going to do any of those, so good luck.

Another parent, Nicole, noted that during the conflict with her child's teacher, there was no follow through with plans or projects for her son with autism:

> She would start different projects that would work with us. As we had an intervener in
> our home and she would tell us different tips and tricks on how to target behaviour that
> you wanted to see manifest. And those were things that were brought on the school level;
> however when she would start them, then they would get pushed to the side.

These comments demonstrate that parents and teachers do not always connect appropriately, or communication is not fully sustained. A question here may be: Who is responsible for maintaining positive and open communication? Do both parents and teachers play an equal part, or do teachers have absolute power over the situation as the gateway to the classroom and its inner workings?

The data collected shows that teachers had significant control over communication. Sara noted that discussions stopped when she refused to medicate her son and Liz experienced both the principal and teacher shutting down her concerns. Conversely, Amy and Carol both elaborated on how they stopped trying to open lines of communications with a teacher when they felt that there was nothing they could do to change the teacher's mind or convince them to try something, although one could argue that the teacher shut down the conversation when they denied the parents' concerns.

While miscommunication is a significant cause of negative interactions, conflict can also arise when teachers and parents do not agree on important issues related to children's education. Amy commented on the personality conflict her son experienced when she stated that "the teacher just can't understand him". She elaborated further by saying:

> I bet she is trying to get power and control and if she gets it from [my son], where he is the leader, she is going to get it from everyone else. But she needs to respect [my son] before [my son], [pause]. Because [my son] has felt so disrespected by her, I believe [my son] respect his elders, but also you have to gain respect after you have lost respect.

These comments demonstrate how specific incidents can harm or complicate interactions between parents and teachers. Whether there is a reluctance to resolve the situation, on either party's side, or there is no impetus to recover the relationship, the result is the same; the interactions will become strained. Sara gave an example of how the teacher was unwilling to work with her if she did not follow the steps the teacher wanted her to (i.e., medicate her son):

> It was just kind of the way it was. It just stayed a rough year for him. Nothing changed, there was no other suggestions given. Other than nothing is going to change. If you are not going to do it, I am not going to help you, kind of situation.

The parents I interviewed explained how they tried to navigate between teachers and principals during tumultuous times but described how their efforts to rectify situations tended to come to nothing and if programs or plans were put into place, they were often not followed or were dropped after a time. The parents elucidated how often issues remained unresolved in the following school year and they would have to begin the process of discussing, negotiating, and planning with the new teacher for that school year.

Another matter to note is that special needs may also complicate interactions, when either the parent or teacher may not fully understand the issues at play. Nicole described how one teacher might not have been qualified or able to work appropriately with her son with autism:

When he was in younger grades, there was teachers that would yell, and it was sensory. He would start to cry. Last year his teacher decided that she didn't understand how she was going to grade him due to the fact that he was on the autism spectrum. Just because you have autism or a different ability, doesn't mean you're any less qualified to be judged or not judged but graded on work that's done, right? So that was the negative experience that I have with her cause she was like, how do I grade this child and what do I do? And I am not sure if that was a personal choice or a lack of training in the education system. I also understand that mental health issues and autism are new [issues in the education system].

Another parent, Liz, explained that her daughter, who also has autism, was forced into physical touch when the classroom teacher allowed and even encouraged the other students to impose hugs on their daughter. When she and her husband addressed the issue with the teacher, they were met with resistance. Liz described how the situation unfolded:

I started to notice that all of the kids from that class were really hugging her. There was a lot of hands-on, kind of treating her like a toy, I felt. I found a lot of them were kind of stopping her and hugging her. I found it weird. Then I noticed one day when I picked her up, that the teacher of that class actually stopped her and spun her around and gave her a hug... She was not very receptive to hearing that she was doing something wrong. And we thought that she was just teaching our daughter that she had to accept unwanted touch

from people and authority. She definitely did not see it that way, and she was quite

defensive.

The above situation with Liz is an example of where the parent may be more aware of the needs

of their child, and the teacher had a chance to learn instead of becoming defensive. While the

teacher may have had good intentions, Liz's concerns were justified, realising that her daughter

may learn to accept unwanted touch. In the case of Nicole's son, she was left believing that her

child may not be getting the services he requires to meet his needs. In both cases, the teacher was

unwilling to learn from the parent, which can lead to parents feeling helpless and wondering

what they are getting out of their education.

In summary, negative interactions may occur for various reasons, but the parents I

interviewed cited experiences where there was a lack of communication, misinformation, and

lack of ability to compromise or work together. The conflict between parents and teachers occurs

for various reasons, as I have indicated, but certain conflict may indicate the influence of

neoliberal ideals. When parents feel they can make demands (Landeros, 2011) or feel that

education should serve the needs of their children (Brown, 1990), these incidences may evidence

marketplace values and influence. The following section examines how neoliberal ideology and

ideals may influence parent-teacher interactions.

Indications of the Influence of Neoliberal Ideology

As predicted, all the parents I interviewed were unfamiliar with the concept of "neoliberal

ideology." When I explicated my interpretation of the term and how it related to my thesis, I

received varied answers to my questions, "One of the issues at school is that some parents feel

they are a consumer or client. What do you think of those ideas? How do you see yourself in this

picture?". One parent, Sara, believes that marketplace values resulted in her having to pay more

for school supplies each year. When asked what she thought about a client-consumer relationship she said:

> I think I am feeling that more, the more overcrowded the kids' school gets. Also, the area that our school is in. At the start of school, it was almost $300 by the time we did school supplies and school fees. $300 is a lot, and that is two kids, that is not even the third one yet. So, it's probably going to be $400 next year. I find that, and the type of activities the school tends to do, are bigger ticket, higher end because I think they just assume that everybody at this end of town has money, perhaps? That part does kind of make me feel a little bit like the consumer-client. When it comes down to the money factor of it all.

Another parent, Sheila, rejected the idea of the client – consumer relationship and stated she believes her and the teachers were more like partners:

> In a way, yes, but in a way, no. We as parents, we are responsible for our children. Not necessarily to be, to put that on the backbone of teachers. But teachers it is their job to educate our children. But it is our job to help educate our children. I don't know as much as I should with my children when it comes to, say, math. With helping my son with math, I help him, right. Because, he is not getting it first hand from the teacher, so I am sort of like a backup. So, working together I don't think we are totally clients or consumers.

Liz showed an awareness of the client- service provider relationship, but rejected it when she stated:

> I don't necessarily think that I am a consumer or client. I understand that there are so many kids and classes keep getting bigger and funding keeps getting smaller. And it's hard to really meet the needs of the kids that are at the top of the academic pile and the

bottom of the academic pile. It's almost impossible. I think that if parents really feel they

want to be a consumer, that option is out there. They can go somewhere and be a

consumer and pay for their kid's education. I don't know, I think that there should be

feedback, but I am not educated in this field, it's not my place to say what should be

taught and what shouldn't.

Carole expressed mixed feelings over the matter, and she stated:

Some schools have evolved to the point where they do offer more services than just

teaching. There is a counsellor in the school that my daughter goes to. There is a whole

bunch of programs, there is this, and there is that. It's not just a one-room school where

the teacher is the teacher anymore. There is certainly a lot happening there. I think, even

myself as a teacher I always thought that I was providing a service. It was my job to teach

those kids, and at the end of it, they had to learn something. I was providing a service to

these parents, be responsible for their kids in my care during the time that I had them. So

that is the way I look at a school. You are providing a service to me and my kids. I don't

know if I consider myself a consumer, no, I guess I would never use that term. But I

suppose client maybe. Guess I never really thought about it that way.

Carole's last comment about her perhaps being a client further demonstrates that neoliberal

ideology influences education and families, but it may be so embedded in the social fabric that it

is not something parents actively think about. These parents expressed that they would like their

children to be provided with a safe, inclusive, and engaging environment, which means there is

an expectation of service. The participants demonstrated that services should be provided and be

beneficial, without the parents having to ask for them. Does this mean that these participants will

not actively demand services if their basic needs for their children are met? While they stated

that the school might be offering services, parents I interviewed would prefer to be partners rather than clients. It is a hopeful message that parents would prefer to work with teachers rather than create a possible adversarial relationship if they were to behave as clients.

I also encouraged participants to reflect on what they believed their role to be in their child's education, where there could be a propensity towards parents controlling their child's education. Overwhelmingly, each parent stated that their role is to support the teachers and their child.

When I asked some parents if they had any expectations or demands of teachers, Sara commented that she wants her children to be "safe" and to return from school "happy", while Carole explained her need for better communication and for teachers and administrators to be open to other suggestions and opinions. Sara described how she would like the school to instil a "sense of community" and expounded:

> Things like, my daughter is the president of the LGBTQ club at her school. They get to do reading buddies type programs. I think that is important too, to have those older kids and younger kids interacting together, so it is not a big segregated space. Not taboo to talk to the grade 8 kids. I also think it brings older kids down a little bit; you are still just a kid. I think that student things like school community projects, like gardening and organising community events, would also. [pause] Doing things that are kind. Makes them feel like people. Sometimes I don't think kids feel like people.

Carole disclosed how she believes that teachers offer a foundation to their students. She discussed how the world is rapidly changing and how teachers need to prepare students for a future that may mean multiple careers by choice and sometimes due to layoffs. While discussing

the role of the teacher, she also speaks how parents are also responsible for helping their children prepare for their future. Carole commented:

> They keep saying that we are trying to prepare them to have multiple jobs throughout their career. They are going to possibly not going be a teacher from 24 until retirement anymore. A lot of people may not. They are going to make a choice to come back to school or make a choice to move and get a different job. That's just the way of the world, and I think that this culture of constant change too, I think they are going to have difficulty staying in one place. They are not going to feel settled.

To summarise, the parents I interviewed described how they view schools as offering services to their children, but do not see themselves as demanding services. Some felt that school staff are behind in meeting the needs of students but understood how administrators and teachers are limited due to budget constraints. The parents in my study view communication as essential but realise that as their children become older and advance through the system, they may not hear from the teachers as much. While the negative interactions were explicated with ample detail and more passionately than the positive interactions, parents leaned towards the positive regardless. They offered realisations that teachers are human and fallible and that not every year will be productive with certain teachers at the helm of their child's class, due to many possible factors.

Summary of Analysis

While I was able to gain some insights from the data I collected, I am aware that the interviews are a mere snapshot of a few parents' experiences. Nevertheless, the interviews showed how factors such as disability can complicate interactions as well as lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. This study aimed to be able to shed light on parent-

teacher relationships and how neoliberal ideology may affect these interactions. The participants explicated that they would prefer to be partners rather than clients which mean that neoliberal ideals may not be affecting parents as much as the literature I explored indicates.

The participants in this study elucidated their desire to educate and socialise their children but realised that their child was not the only student in the school. Perhaps a way to combat individualised and high stakes learning are to view education as more of a democratic base, where students will gain a variety of knowledge, including that there is a world of competition out there.

These interviews illustrated to me how arcane the concept "neoliberal ideology" can be, in that some parents commented that it was "just the way it was". Embedded systems of marketplace values in education may be seen as just how education works. The current competitive nature of most of the member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) operate with marketplace values, with any commodity or organisation as marketable. The prevalent state of consumerism and the power of marketplace values, neoliberal ideology may be seen as simply existing (Flew, 2014; McMurtry, 1991; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), or as Venugopal (2015) explains, it "is everywhere, but at the same time, nowhere" (p. 165). Many parents, teachers, administrators, and government officials in the member nations of the OECD may be mirroring marketplace values in education to mimic the marketplace values of the prevalent consumerist way of life, most likely unintentionally. Neoliberal ideology is hegemonic in the sense of becoming embedded in societal fabric in ways that have become normative and unquestioned. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) suggest, neoliberal ideology is akin to water that surrounds fish; fish are so immersed in water they cannot even discern it. Without an awareness of water, it cannot be examined. The people I

interviewed seemed mostly unaware of neoliberal influence on education and how it might shape

their interactions with teachers, which suggests that the ideology may have become doxa

(Chopra, 2003).

Another facet may be that parents are neutral when it comes to marketplace values. It

appears, through examination of my data, that the parents I interviewed do not react strongly in

terms of neoliberal ideals. The parents described how they would prefer to be partners with

teachers and had basic expectations of services from school staff. This neutrality could mean that

neoliberal ideology may not have much to do with the interactions between parents and teachers.

While the literature I examined, in large, states the opposite, it would be worth examining the

issue of neoliberal ideology's influence over schooling matters in more detail.

In the next section, I considered how my findings might be contextualised and understood

in light of the scholarship that I reviewed in Chapter Two. I re-examined neoliberal ideology and

education, parental engagement in education, and parent-teacher interactions, in light of my

findings.

Chapter Five: Reflecting on the Data and the Literature

"Research is to see what everybody has seen and think what nobody has thought."

– Albert Szent-Györgyi

My research question "How might neoliberal ideology shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-perceived role in the schools of their children?" has driven my research and has led me to draw some tentative conclusions. Contrary to the literature I explored, the participants in my study did not align themselves with a client approach; rather, they explained how they preferred partnerships with teachers. This chapter is a reflection on both the literature I examined along with the data I collected. I reviewed some of the themes that I initially analysed in the literature review and revisited these themes with my analysis in mind.

Neoliberal Ideology, Power, and Education

After I had collected the interview data for this research, I began to question how power operates in parent-teacher interactions. Although the question was not the focus of my research, it is relevant to discuss given that a client or consumer disposition among parents in the context of the schooling of their children is a matter of asserting their power and what they perceive as their rights. Neoliberal ideology forms the basis of such assertions, despite most parents' lack of awareness of what neoliberal ideology might mean and how it might be relevant to the schooling of children. Under the influence of neoliberal ideology, the dynamic of power shifts in schooling contexts. Government officials have the power to change curricula, teachers have the power to interact with parents on their terms, and the literature shows that parents seem to be demanding more for their children (Brown, 1990; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011; Landeros, 2011; Šteh & Kalin, 2011). I was left, however, wondering if parents who position themselves as

clients or consumers actually get what they want as they would in other contexts of being

provided with services.

Brown (1990) sees a shift towards a more market influenced education system is

concerned that this shift will create racial, cultural, and gender divides. He states that the

question of who gets to be educated is a "political question concerning the distribution of

knowledge, power and life chances" (p. 80). If the parents I interviewed do not want to make

demands of teachers, would that put them at a disadvantage to parents who do make demands?

Brown (1990) explicates that in a marketplace driven environment, "formal equality" exists

under the law, but not "substantive equality" (p. 73). What this means is that there are benefits to

those with the means to take advantage of making demands and paying for education, such as

middle-class parents, but not so for those who do not have the financial or social means to

navigate a consumer-driven education system.

Neoliberal ideology may be well known to researchers, but in the general population, as

well as most teachers and administrators in schools, many may have never heard of the term

before or have not developed an understanding of it. As previously stated, the parents I

interviewed, unsurprisingly, had little to no knowledge of neoliberal ideology, yet were able to

speak about marketplace values. Venugopal (2015) examines neoliberal ideology and found that

it is a "rhetorical tool and moral device" (p. 183), which could indicate the ideology is so

entrenched that it has become doxa (Chopra, 2003). Conversely, Giroux (2013) believes that the

prevalence of neoliberal ideology has made it "more difficult to respond to the demands of the

social contract, public good, and the social state, which have been pushed to the margins of

society - viewed as both an encumbrance and a pathology" (p. 359). Both Venugopal and Giroux

illuminate the pervasiveness and abstruseness of neoliberal ideology, which implies how difficult the ideology may be to grasp, let alone recognise.

Neoliberal ideology or being influenced by marketplace values may induce parents to demand more of teachers (Deslandes et al., 2015; McMurtry, 1991). The parents I interviewed had basic expectations of schools, such as an educational base, communication, and ensuring the well-being of their child, but they did not position themselves as clients who demand services. They had fundamental expectations but had no intention of making other demands of teachers. Below I examine several insights that I discerned from the literature review and the interviews I conducted.

Neoliberal ideology and power. My first insight is that marketplace values may affect parents to demand more from their child's teachers, but the parents that I interviewed seemed to be generally happy with the education their children have received. As previously stated, the participants did not align themselves as clients, but as partners or helpers. While the literature I explored showed that there are parents who are increasingly demanding more services (Brown, 1990; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011; Landeros, 2011; Šteh & Kalin, 2011), the parents I interviewed may understand the constraints teachers are currently under and that demanding more of them may further complicate interactions. Thus, I would conclude that as a matter of neoliberal influence on teacher-parent interactions, some parents may have a propensity to work towards a partnership with teachers than to behave as clients of education than the literature presents.

After the examination of neoliberal ideology, I regarded more closely power in education. While the parents I interviewed did not align themselves as clients, parents who do may be using financial and social power to ensure that they get what they want out of education for their

children. When parents behave in a manner where they feel they can make demands of teachers and administrators, they may view education as a service in which they can persuade change (Deslandes, Barma, & Morin, 2015; Katyal & Evers, 2007). When regarding neoliberal ideals and power, one could question whether parents with more financial and social means feel they can make demands while those in lower socio-economic statuses may not realize or feel they have the power to demand of teachers.

Parents who do not have the financial or social influence to be able to advocate for their child may not receive the same standard of education as their privileged peers (Brown, 1990) or be able to assert influence on par with middle-class or rich parents. Fair schooling should be offered to all children in public education and should not allow the creation of a divide between students of higher and lower socioeconomic status, through a type of parentocracy (DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016). When parents take advantage of their status to make demands, neoliberal ideals may be at play.

The parents I interviewed stated that they did not feel able to change administrators' or teachers' minds when they have made a decision demonstrates that the participants in this study do not align themselves as clients. The inability to argue further or the defeated manner of retreat shows a shift in power and as Bourdieu (1998) explained that space could impact interactions. This symbolic capital of space may leave parents believing that they have less control or power in a situation regarding school matters or happenings (Bourdieu, 1998). Teachers may have a power advantage in having schools as their geographic space. While the literature I examined presented parents as demanding more, the parents I interviewed conveyed their understanding of the difficulty of the teaching position. It is possible there are parents that do not realize they

could wield power for change in education, but my research shows that there are parents that want to be partners or helpers without a desire to domineer over teachers and administrators.

Unmet requests and concerns. A second insight derives from the comments parents made about when they had had interactions with school staff and felt that their voices were not heard or that their requests would remain unmet. Liz's concerns, for example, were even outrightly denied, when her daughter was receiving forced hugs. If parent requests have gone unmet or their expectations are repeatedly dashed, perhaps they do not feel that they have any power to create change for their child. When parents did not feel able to change administrators' or teachers' minds when they had made a decision demonstrates that the participants in this study do not align themselves as clients. Had the parents pursued the matter further to demand the teacher or principal sway to their favour, neoliberal ideology could be an influence. One could also assume that the parents may not realize their influence or power over teachers and administrators. Perhaps parents in higher socio-economic statuses assume they are in control over school staff due to their social status (DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016).

Both Bourdieu and Foucault regarded power as fluctuating, and Bourdieu (1998) elucidated how once one tries to examine points of power, one may focus on one structure while either masking or missing another structure of power. Foucault (1980b) stated that power exists when it is exercised and "power is essentially that which represses" (pp. 89-90). He went further to state that power cannot be given or exchanged, which means that power likely ebbs and flows between parents and teachers. This means that power exchanges are constantly in flux between parents and teachers, but the parents in my study shared instances where teachers and administrators held more power to conclude conversations and shut down interactions.

Conversely, it may be difficult to pinpoint where the power is held, since as stated above, I may be examining one aspect of power while ignoring or missing another aspect (Bourdieu, 1998).

Financial burdens on parents. A third insight stems from an interesting reflection from one of Sara's responses. She felt like the neoliberalization of schools meant that education costs more for her as a parent. Her complaint was with the school supply list and how teachers were asking for more each year. I question if doing so has more to do with dwindling government funds or more to do with demands of better services in the classrooms. The cost to keep up with technology needs alone can add to the increasing financial pressure on schools. Sara's comments can be aligned with neoliberal influence on the cost of schooling and how parents will be responsible for paying for their child's education. I connect these remarks to Friedman's (1982) comments about the belief that parents should be financially responsible for their children's education. Across Canada, cost of school supplies varies (Consolidated Credit Services of Canada), but globally the fees and cost of uniforms can keep children from accessing an education (Werft, 2015). Perhaps a shift towards placing financial responsibility on parents is a glimpse at the possibility of a growing trend to have parents pay for their child's education.

The next section examines how parents engage in the education of their children. The parents I interviewed seemed to try to interact with teachers but were not always successful.

Parental Engagement in Education

Parents who hold more cultural capital (Lareau et al., 2018) or have marketplace beliefs about the purposes of education (Brown, 1990) may hold more power over teachers who may not be able to negotiate or mediate the parents' educational demands for their child. To reiterate from above, parents with the financial means have more access to make demands such as school choice, while working-class parents are typically at a disadvantage to such access. In Ontario,

where private schools are mainly available in larger city centres, there are still a number of parents choosing private over public citing mostly a disappointment in the public system or religious reasons (Van Pelt, Allison, & Allison, 2007).

Conversely, teachers and administrators usually hold the power of controlling education, especially over working-class parents (Vincent, 1996). Lareau (2000) elucidates how parents and teachers are seen as "natural enemies", since parents regard only their child, while the teacher must consider all their students (p. 159). She goes further to explicate that a parent's "social resources" can aid or hinder their ability to interact with administrators and teachers (p.159). Social class can affect the resources students have, therefore giving middle and upper-class students an advantage compared to their working-class peers (Lareau, 2000; Vincent, 1996). As described in the previous section, parentocracy potentially affects schools in creating stark a divide between students, which creates unequal opportunities in education. This led me to further consider insights from my study, with a focus on difficult interactions between parents and teachers, which I examined below.

Unheard voices. The parents I interviewed held mostly positive opinions about their children's teachers. They discussed positive interactions and told stories of teachers who made their children feel special and who made them, as parents, feel heard. Perkins (2015) is critical of how collaboration and partnerships are formed, explaining that there is a lot of rhetoric offered by school administrators, where a façade is created to portray the illusion of collaboration, when in fact school policy creates situations which are unjust and where there will be "little prospect of challenging metanarratives that tell a story of who has something to offer to our schools and who does not" (p. 317). This means that there may not be a place made in schools for parents to share their thoughts, wishes, or opinions.

Negative interactions. Negative incidences may lead parents to disengage as well as lead them to be unwilling to participate in school matters or events. The research would indicate that these negative incidents could lead to parents becoming demanding, but the participants show how miscommunication or personality conflicts could lead to negative interactions. An illusion of collaboration is potentially a public relations exercise, which is a neoliberal construct that justifies the status quo and "packages" it to consumers, including parents (Perkins, 2015).

The negative interactions that the participants shared illuminated difficult situations where they felt unwelcome and discounted. Both Carol and Sara discussed incidents in which the teacher made decisions contrary to their wishes, and they felt helpless to change the situation. Perhaps not all negative interactions are indicative of neoliberal influence. Perkins examines Joyce King's argument that teachers and administrators are becoming "dysconscious", which King (1991) defines as "the limited and distorted understandings [people] have about inequity and cultural diversity-understandings that make it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education" (p. 134). In other words, parents will likely be dissuaded to be participants in their child's education if they think their participation will lead to nought.

As stated in the literature review, parental engagement improves student academic achievement (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000, 2011). Nevertheless, many factors hinder involvement such as class, culture, and health (Lawson, 2003). Despite the benefits of parents' involvement in education, partnerships between teachers and parents may be compromised due to many external and internal factors. Perhaps working to maintain mostly positive interactions will be more fruitful than pursuing full partnerships. The participants in my study described a desire for more communication and more mutual understanding and, conversely, they did not seem concerned with becoming more involved in their child's school other than assisting

teachers when needed. As previously stated, perhaps parents feel powerless since teachers and

principals have a geographic advantage, given that schools would be considered their territory

(Bourdieu, 1989). Parents, in general, may not realize they have the power to demand services or

conversely, they may even feel intimidated by the teacher's authority (Swartz, 1997).

In the following sections, I examined the interactions between parents and teachers and I

contextualised my findings from the parents I interviewed with the scholarship that explores the

roles and dispositions of parents in the context of neoliberal influence on schooling.

Parent-Teacher Interactions

As with parental engagement, there are many barriers to positive parent-teacher

interactions such as class, perceptions, disabilities, and culture (Hornby, 2000; Malsbary, 2016;

Myers & Myers, 2013). In the previous chapters, I questioned who may hold more power within

parent-teacher interactions. During interviews, parents seemed hesitant to claim a position of

power, stating instead that they would prefer to be partners with teachers. While some

curriculum documents in Canadian provinces have sections on parental involvement (Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2017), some believe it is more, to put it colloquially, lip service than

practice (Myers & Myers, 2013; Vincent, 1996). Ellis, Lock, and Lummis (2015) believe the

standardisation and outlining of parental involvement will lead to more parent engagement and

parent-teacher interactions.

Difficulties when interacting. During the interviews, parents stated that they had more

positive than negative interactions with teachers. They also all agreed that some teachers were

easier to communicate with than others, demonstrating that perhaps different personalities shape

interactions in various ways and, conceivably, both parents and teachers may need to adapt year

to year to each other in regard to communication (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011). In the

literature review chapter, I examined the various ways in which teachers interact with parents. While teachers may be able to use technology, or different strategies to engage parents, parents themselves could attempt to request communication in a fashion that better suits their needs (Epstein, 2001; Graham-Clay, 2005; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016; Hornby 2000).

Parents, in general, may need to find ways to interact with teachers in a way that leans more towards a partnership than a client-service provider model. Both parents and teachers may be concerned with a child's education and wellbeing; parents may need to realise the obvious, that their child is not the only child in the class. Endrizzi's (2008) model of mutualism suggests parents and teachers work together to benefit the child, but she recognises that there is a history of contention that may hinder interactions. Parents and teachers would benefit from speaking with each other on how best to work together and work towards being open to each others' suggestions and ideas without feeling that one or the other is dominating decision making. What this means is that power needs to be shared. Teachers bring in expert knowledge in education, while parents bring insights on the child to enhance teachers' ability to educate students.

In reflection on the discussion of power, power-sharing may prove illusory. When navigating interactions between parents and teachers, myriad factors play a role in support or hindrance to these exchanges (Katyal & Evers, 2007; Lareau, 2000; Lawson, 2003). Bourdieu (1998) believed that when examining one aspect of power, another aspect is hidden or disregarded. This means that interactions between parents and teachers may have various power struggles that go unnoticed if one focuses on perceivable points of power. The effects of neoliberal ideology positioning parents as clients may be just one small aspect of negative interactions between parents and teachers. While my research demonstrates fairly neutral responses from parents in regard to marketplace values, it is important to continue to examine

and question neoliberal influence on education and parent-teacher interactions as well as how power can affect these interchanges.

The parents I interviewed held mainly positive notions of parental involvement in their children's school despite that the literature illuminates a disconnect between home and school, where partnerships between parents and teachers are unlikely to be formed (Myers & Myers, 2013; Perkins, 2015; Vincent, 1996). As examined in the literature review, partnerships are created when teachers and administrators make parents feel welcome but also when parents feel heard (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000; Šteh & Kalin, 2011). Positive interactions depend on mutual agreements and trust (Endrizzi, 2008) but are shaped by the personalities of parents and teachers.

In sum, examining how neoliberal ideology affects these interactions adds another complexity where parents may try to impose their demands on teachers who may react as service providers. Among the parents whom I interviewed, however, such imposition was not evident in what they had to say. Human interactions are complex and can be affected by many outside influences, such as socio-economic status, language, and culture, as stated above. While there are many barriers, parents and teachers should continue to work on creating positive interactions for the benefit of the child (McGrath, 2007).

The next section regards questions that arose as I worked on the analysis of this study.

Questions in Light of Analysis

My analysis of the data and my discussion of what it might mean in the context of the purpose of this research led me to ponder other questions such as: How far can or should parents influence school policy and teachers' classroom methods? At what point do the 'experts' control how the education system conducts itself, and how extensively will parents' influence drive change? Brown (1990) coined the term 'parentocracy' which he describes as "where a child's

education is increasingly upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils" (p. 66). Brown's (1990) perspective seems to go conjointly with neoliberal ideology when he explains parentocracy will assume that "open competition between schools will raise standards for all and offer real choices to parents. However, those schools which fail to recruit enough pupils (sell desk space for the services they have on offer) should be allowed to go out of business" (p. 74). While it may be useful to obtain parent insights when reviewing policies and curriculum, I believe that educational experts should lead the change in education, although this belief may stem from my experience as an educator.

The discussion in this chapter highlights the considerable effects of neoliberal ideology on education. The issues at play include power dynamics between teachers and parents and how curriculum and services might be shaped, accordingly. Marketplace values would change the landscape of public education in favour of individuals who have the means to get what they want for their children. Bourdieu cautions that ''schools help both to perpetuate and legitimate inequalities'', thus it is imperative that the government work to offer fair and just education for all students (p. 42). Conversely, the parents in my study show there are parents that do not view themselves as clients, which means there may be more of an effort on parents' part to work towards partnerships. Another possibility is that they may not feel they have to power to change anything, especially as their children age.

Concluding Reflections

The interactions between parents and teachers are complex and diverse, with many variables at play. Culture, language, poverty, personality conflict, and lack of administrative support are just a few of the things that may affect these interactions. Neoliberal ideology shapes parent and teacher interactions given the broader context of marketplace values that influence

parents' demands for services in ways that position education as a commodity rather than a

social asset (Giroux, 2011; Preston & Aslett, 2014). Parental involvement and how teachers and

administrators welcome or dissuade parents may also affect positive interactions between parents

and teachers. When parents demand services, indicative of neoliberal influence, the effects may

be difficult to examine given that neoliberal ideology has become ubiquitous and thus difficult to

see (Flew, 2014; McMurtry, 1991), not unlike the metaphor of fish unaware of the water that

surrounds them (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

The concluding chapter offers recommendations for parents and teachers and makes

suggestions for further research. I also examine how neoliberal ideology affects interactions

between parents and teachers and how neoliberal ideology may affect the parents I interviewed.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

"Things get done only if the data we gather can inform and inspire those in a position

to make a difference."

– Michael Schmoker

In this chapter, I offer recommendations to parents and teachers in light of how neoliberal ideology may impact interactions. While I am left with more questions than answers, as seen in my analysis chapter, I offer the following suggestions in order to draw insights on interactions between parents and teachers when considering broader forces of neoliberalism.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the research was to examine the perspectives of Canadian parents of elementary school children with respect to their interactions with teachers and to analyse those interactions to determine the extent to which they reflect a neoliberal ideology. When regarding neoliberal ideology as doxa, or a common belief, it is not surprising that most of the parents I interviewed had never heard of neoliberal ideology or neoliberalism and were trying to wrap their thoughts around education as a commodity. One parent, Sara, thought that that meant she was being forced to pay more out of pocket for resources for her children's school. Others simply did not know how to answer when I asked about client-service provider relationships. While most of the participants agreed that they require some sort of service from the school, such as better communication and safety, they were uncomfortable stating that they had any such demands. Perhaps participants felt embarrassed about being perceived by me as "demanding," and shaped their responses during the interviews accordingly.

In my discussion of the relevant scholarship, I noted that many of the books and articles recommend a partnership between parents and teachers (Epstein, 2010; Klein, & Ballantine,

1999; Glasgow, & Whitney, 2009; Hornby, 2011). Relatedly, Vincent (1996) explores the "unequal power relations" between parents and teacher (p. 157). While partnerships between parents and teachers may lessen the need for parents to make demands, Vincent notes how there is often a clear division between the school sphere and home sphere and where parents are not fully welcome as participants in school matters. This imbalance of power may give power to teachers over parents (Vincent, 1996). In short, neoliberal ideology may be a surreptitious and pervasive ideology that will continue to influence education, administrators, parents, and teachers, often without their knowledge. In order to create more positive interactions despite marketplace ideology creating a possible client-service provider dynamic, parents and teachers should continue to work together as partners in children's schooling, rather than against each other as might be the case in client- service provider dynamics.

In the following sections, then, I offer recommendations to support such partnerships.

Recommendations for Parents

The literature I explored stated that parents represent a wide variety of personalities, which may seem obvious, but it is worth noting that some authors categorise parents as "controlling", "angry", or "apathetic" (see Bender, 2005; McEwan, 1998). They offer suggestions to teachers on how to "deal" with these kinds of parents. There are also online articles for parents that lay out steps for dealing with difficult teachers (see Dougherty Reinke, 2016) as well as articles and books on how to become more involved in schools (see Epstein, 2010; Klein, & Ballantine, 1999).

Accessing resources. The above resources lead to my first recommendation, which would be for parents to access online resources when they need help navigating the school system or need advice on how to communicate with teachers. An abundance of information is

available to parents, but they may not access these resources for various reasons; lack of time, access to technology, level of literacy, level of computer literacy, for example. There are also online articles on how parents can advocate for their children (Hartwell-Walker, 2016), although I question if there is a fine line between advocating and demanding services as clients. During the interviews, the parents did not express a desire to demand services from teachers, but some research shows that there are many parents that currently do want to demand services and exercise parentocracy (Brown, 1990).

Creating partnerships. My second recommendation to parents is to work with teachers to resolve issues or problems pertaining to their children's schooling, rather than demanding certain programs or change. There are times when parents may go directly to administrators rather than the teacher, but the teacher should be the first point of contact.

The above information could be disseminated in anecdotal articles or blogs; it could also stem from administrators encouraging parents to discuss issues with teachers first before getting involved at the office level. What this means for me is that I need to consider publishing blog articles on my research in ways that parents and teachers can access it.

Recommendations for Teachers

Many books and articles are available for teachers on how to maintain positive parent-teacher interactions. Despite such resources, most teachers are not offered course content on parent-teacher interactions during their teacher training (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998) Teachers may be left to seek out information on how to maintain positive relationships, which may lead to inconsistency among teachers in their ability to foster and maintain relationships with parents.

Availability of teachers. On the question of parental involvement in schools, my first recommendation for teachers is that they should ensure that times for parents to participate in school events, parent-teacher conferences, and the like, are varied; such as the option of phone calls, online video conversations, or the offer of different time availability for meetings. Not all parents can come during the day, and some parents may never find time out of their work schedule to participate. Where possible, teachers should offer flexible options for meeting with parents, understanding that some parents may not be able to participate due to various reasons, such as jobs, mental health, language, and poverty. Additionally, working-class parents are at a disadvantage compared to their upper and middle-class contemporaries. While the parents I interviewed did not express a desire to make demands as clients, other parents make such demands and get what they want, students of parents who are not demanding may find themselves at a disadvantage. Perhaps the squeaky wheel does, indeed, get the grease. As some research indicates, certain parents are able to demand to get what they want while other parents without the social or monetary means to make demands are at a disadvantage (Mueller et al., 2008). There may be many factors at play in why parents do not participate, as previously stated in the literature review.

Community participation. My second recommendation stems from the comment of one parent I interviewed. Sara mentioned how the community was important to her in the growth of her children. She explained how groups such as the LGBTQ alliance, including participating teachers, resulted in her daughter being involved in her school community at a deeper level than if the alliance did not exist. In general, then, teachers can create meaningful experiences by encouraging students to form groups as well as working on bringing in community leaders to

share other life experiences and events that are happening within the surrounding areas and world.

Teachers starting off on a positive note. Finally, my third suggestion is for teachers to reach out to parents early on in the school year, in addition to other times throughout the year. Doing so is above the expected communication when problems arise or during parent-teacher conferences. Several parents, I interviewed also stated that it may be hard to create a positive relationship because students are with teachers for such a short period. While an academic year may seem long, by the time report cards rollout and plans are set in place, it is often the case that students move on to the next classroom teacher only to start all over again (O'Sullivan, 2013). The need for parents to make demands may be reduced if they feel they are being heard and included in decisions about their child throughout the year.

While there are many factors for teachers to consider, my suggestions work to aid in understanding the possible barriers to communication and the broader force of neoliberal ideology that may affect interactions with parents.

Additional note for teachers

As a former teacher and as a student who has studied the constraints of neoliberal ideology, these suggestions are not made to overburden or overwhelm teachers who already have a heavy workload. After thoroughly examining the effects of neoliberal ideology on policies in education, I realize that teachers, in order to keep up with their workload, are working after school uncompensated and their access to resources continues to diminish (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011).

Suggestions for Further Research

When reflecting on my original question, "How might neoliberal ideology shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-perceived role in the schools of their children?", I realise that more research needs to be undertaken. My participants gave me thoughtful and interesting answers, but I foresee more questions and possible avenues for research. These include: Can curricula goals be changed to be more student-focused and less marketplace-focused? How can neoliberal influence be addressed and mitigated in how it may shape interactions between parents and teachers? How can teachers and administrators respond when parents take on the role of being a demanding client? Does having a student with autism or special needs affect how parents make requests or demands of teachers?

The line of questioning may have to be changed in order to get more comprehensive answers from parents about how they view the client-service provider interactions between themselves and the teachers. One suggestion is to perhaps ask more direct questions in regard to parent-teacher meetings as well as questioning what parents believe should be changed to make their child's education better. A second suggestion would be to question parents about how they better interact with administrators and teachers and perhaps question how they would change the way they are invited to interact with their child's education. A third suggestion is to expand the study to involve teachers' voices which would allow for a balanced view from both sides, rather than solely the parents' viewpoint. A final suggestion is that if I were to continue this research in a doctoral thesis, I would want to be able to access a wider variety of voices from parents; such as seeking out parents from both high and low socioeconomic neighbourhoods, parents from both rural and urban settings, as well as parents from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The scope of this thesis could have been greater had there been more time and wider access to

participants. A questionnaire sent through a school district or community groups may allow me to receive a more comprehensive and wider range of answers.

Conclusion

I pursued this research because of my previous experiences as a teacher and the desire to understand the bigger concerns at play when regarding parent-teacher interactions. Using neoliberal ideology as a theoretical lens through which to examine these relationships led me to understand some of the issues that may interfere with positive interactions. Employing aspects of phenomenology allowed me to delve into conversations with parents and their lived experiences with teachers.

My research showed that there are parents who are very positive about teachers and education, despite having had negative interactions. Overall, the parents I interviewed did not view education as a commodity and teachers as service providers, but as my literature review demonstrated, there are many parents who do and will continue to make demands of teachers. The behaviour and disposition of such parents should not be a surprise given how, as various theorists such as Giroux (2011, 2016) note, neoliberal ideology has had a powerful influence on society, including practices of schooling and dominant beliefs about what education is for, in the first place. Lareau (2000) comments that there is no one best way to teach or learn, there is also "no one best way for parents to be involved in schooling" (p. 192).

As Carol noted during her interview, the way teachers generally educate students has not changed in decades; for example, desks in a row, grouping by age, not ability. Conversely, researchers have examined that there have been major shifts in the way teachers teach, there are also questions of perhaps too much change too often and too quickly (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011). One reason some parents make more demands may be that many public

schools lack technology and have little focus on 21st-century learning, especially in rural areas (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2011). Neoliberal ideology positions education as a means to social mobility and global access to jobs (Chopra, 2003) and technology and 21st learning strategies are a way for students to compete in the global market (Mitchell, 2003). If parents are influenced by marketplace ideals, they may be more likely to make demands for their children's education.

As my research unfolded, I began to wonder about who, in general, holds more power in the parent-teacher dynamic. I believe teachers, as educational professionals, will always hold at least a little more power than parents given that teachers are trained professionals in curriculum and pedagogy. Many factors may impact the power dynamic, such as place or social capital, and the position of power may always be in flux (Bourdieu, 1989, Foucault, 1980b). When considering the interaction Liz had with the principal about the teacher allowing forced hugs on her daughter, there is a lesson to learn; teachers do not know everything. Teaching professionals should make space for error and learn from the mistakes that are bound to happen throughout their career. While it may not be acceptable for parents to make excessive demands, in order to consider more of a partnership, the parents' voices cannot be discounted.

How educational policy on parent-teacher interactions continues to change and how teachers adapt to it will help in the successful formation of positive interactions with parents and the creation of a body of students who love to learn, rather than students who have to learn for a job. I am not opposed to students developing skills that they can use when entering the workforce. What concerns me is when education for employability eclipses education for civic and political engagement. The latter might foster some parents to position themselves as clients of education. If parents and teachers are able to try to work together to create more of a

partnership that Epstein (2009) and Hornby (2000) suggest, positive interactions would result, keeping at bay the tendency of some parents to make demands of teachers. Neoliberal ideology may be a powerful force in the processes of schooling and rationale for why education exists in the first place, but, as participants in this research demonstrate, client-oriented behaviours and dispositions of parents towards teachers has not become ubiquitous, perhaps not even normative.

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Appendix A

Advertisement Looking for Participants through Social Media

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH IN PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS

Looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
the interactions between parents and teachers.
As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: *answer a series of open-ended questions*
Criteria to participate in this study*: You are a parent of a child enrolled in grade 1 to 8 and you*
have had at least one positive and one negative interaction with a teacher
Your participation would involve *one* session,
which would be approximately *60-90* minutes. Your participance is voluntary and your identity
and information collected will remain confidential.
For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:
Allison Whately-Doucet
Faculty of Education
at
awhately@lakeheadu.ca
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Gerald Walton
Email: gwalton@lakeheadu.ca

This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance
through a Lakehead University Research Ethics Committee
If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may
also contact the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board Administration Officer, Sue Wright,
(807) 343-8283, or susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca

Appendix B

Letter of Information for Potential Participants

December 2017

Dear Potential Research Participant,

You have shown interest in participating in a research study on parent-teacher interactions. This research will require that:

- You are a parent of a child currently enrolled in grade 1-8

- You have had at least one positive and one negative experience with a teacher

- You have 1-1 ½ hours of time to discuss your experiences with teachers.

Please be aware that:

- Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission.

- Your identity and information collected will be kept confidential.

- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study until the first draft of the thesis has been completed.

- You may decline to answer any questions during the interview, for any reasons.

- The results from this study will be presented in a graduate thesis, as well as in scholarly articles. The results may also be presented to various school districts in the region.

If you require any information about this study or would like to speak to the researcher, please contact:

Allison Whately-Doucet (awhately@lakeheadu.ca) or Dr. Gerald Walton, Faculty Supervisor (gwalton@lakeheadu.ca).

If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board Administration Officer, Sue Wright, (807) 343-8283, or susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix C

Description of the Research and Consent Form

Dear Potential Research Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The following is information regarding the thesis research by Master of Education Student Allison Whately-Doucet.

Research question: How might neoliberal ideology shape parent-teacher interactions and parents' self-perceived role in the schools of their children?

Description of the research: Working to better understand the constraints placed on both parents and teachers, I will explore how marketplace ideology (or neoliberalism) potentially influences parent-teacher interactions. Neoliberalism is an ideology that favours privatization and individualism and is essentially the idea that every commodity or service is marketable and marketplace rules will benefit all aspects of human life.
Through interviewing parents, I will investigate how treating education as a private commodity may affect parent-teacher relationships, including the ways that parents interact with teachers, as well as their perception of treatment from teachers.

Purpose: I aim to use my research to help inform both parents and teachers on how to communicate more effectively to achieve mutually positive results. The research will lead to a thesis report, suggestions to school boards, and possibly articles in educational journals.

Your role: I require participants that have had one good experience and one bad experience with a teacher or teachers. A positive interaction may have resulted in wanting to write a thank you note to the teacher, or the like. A negative interaction may have led to including administrators to meeting as a mediator, for example. You will be interviewed in one session for 60 to 90 minutes.

If you require any information about this study or would like to speak to the researcher, please contact:

Allison Whately-Doucet (awhately@lakeheadu.ca) or Dr. Gerald Walton, Faculty Supervisor (gwalton@lakeheadu.ca).

If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board Administration Officer, Sue Wright, (807) 343-8283, or susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca.

Consent Form and Description of Research

(One copy for the participant and one copy for the researcher)

December 2017

Dear Potential Research Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study on parent-teacher interactions.

- This research would require about 1-1 ½ hours of your time. During this time, you would be interviewed about your experiences with teachers.

- The interviews would be conducted wherever you prefer (e.g. coffee shop, university campus library, or other public or private location).

- Interviews would be audio-recorded with your consent.

- You may decline to answer any question, at any time, for any reason.

- The transcripts, the thesis report, and in any other future publications or presentations, your identity and information collected would be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms.

- All data collected will be stored electronically on a password protected computer for five years' time.

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study until the first draft of the thesis has been completed.

- If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may indicate further below on the consent form.

If you require any information about this study or would like to speak to the researcher, please contact:

Allison Whately-Doucet (awhately@lakeheadu.ca) **or**

Dr. Gerald Walton, Faculty Supervisor (gwalton@lakeheadu.ca).

Finally, if you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board Administration Officer, Sue Wright, (807) 343-8283, or susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca.

<u>Consent Form:</u>

I understand that I _____ (name of participant) can withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason, and with no penalty, until the draft thesis is written.

_____ (Participant's Signature)

I understand the above information regarding this research study on parent-teacher interactions, and consent to participate in this study. _____

(Printed Name) _____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

I would like to receive an emailed copy of the thesis   yes ☐   no ☐

Email address (if copy is desired): _____

Are you willing to be contacted for follow-up questions or clarifications?   yes ☐   no ☐

Best way to reach you for follow-up or clarification:

_____

Are you willing to verify the transcripts of your interview? yes ☐   no ☐

Best way to reach you for verification of transcripts: email ☐   phone ☐

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Are you willing to verify the final draft of the thesis   yes ☐   no ☐

Best way to reach you for verification of final draft: email ☐   phone ☐

Email: _____

Phone: _____