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Guest Editorial

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ICCTE Journal

Supporting Christian Scholarship And Service

Guest Editorial

Dr. Karen Buchanan and Dr. Thomas Buchanan

Welcome to this special issue of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education (ICCTE) Journal: *Preparing Teachers to Collaborate with Families & Communities: Faith Informed Perspectives*. We are appreciative of the privilege of guest editing this special edition of the ICCTE Journal. We are grateful to the editorial team for providing us this opportunity. There are several qualities that might qualify us for such a task: we are both professors of education at a private Christian university; we have a passion for a systems approach to teaching and learning, and most of our research and writing has been in the area of how to prepare new teachers who are ready to collaborate with families and communities on behalf of the healthy development of students in their classrooms. There is another thing, however, that profoundly influences our thinking and work in this area. We are followers of Jesus.

We strive to shape our lives after the example of the one who, being in the very image of God, chose to humble himself and take on the nature of a servant (Philippians 2:6-11). We ponder the implications of acknowledging that everyone that we interact with is fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God (Psalm 139:14, Genesis 1:27). We recognize that Jesus places great value on everyone, and that when we do not, he takes that very seriously (John 3:16; James 2:13). We read that “believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism” and we wonder what that might mean for us as teachers (James 2:1, NIV). We are challenged by the admonition to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). Part of our Christian calling is that we value each other. When we understand the work of God, it will impact how we treat others. We believe that when we engage with people who are different from ourselves, instead of judging them, Jesus

would have us prefer them. We should become a learner of people who do not have our experience.

Thus we are asking the question, as a teacher, what does it mean to actively and seriously seek the voices of others who would have something to say about what is best for learners in the classroom? We are all aware that the education of children is a complex endeavor with numerous challenges. Our Christian faith leads us to address those challenges through a sincere interest in what parents, caregivers, other members of our school community, and those in the community at large may have to say about supporting the healthy development of their children.

This last spring, an extensive state research report entitled, *A Crisis of Disrupted Learning; Conditions in our Schools and Recommended Solutions*, emerged in our local news feed and news media (Severance, 2019). The findings in this report align with the kinds of things we are hearing from teacher candidates, principals, and teachers in the field. The classrooms that we are preparing candidates for today have deeper and wider needs than when we first entered teacher preparation. Teachers report being overwhelmed by the extensive amount of student needs that must be addressed if these students are able to grow and learn both academically and in their personal well-being. A teacher, alone, will never be able to meet this enormous challenge. There is a need to re-think the role of the professional teacher.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, who has been engaged in research in the field of family and community engagement for over four decades, recently shared movement in thinking regarding this area of research. She shares an up-dated definition of the work of the teaching professional:

Research over the past 30 years, however, redefines 'professional' as a teacher who understands that education is a shared responsibility of home, school, and community. A professional teacher knows how to work effectively with students, parents, other family members, community partners, and colleagues to promote student learning, positive attitudes, attendance, and other important outcomes. Of course, the professional teacher also retains unique and valued competencies in subject matter knowledge and teaching skills. (Epstein, 2018, p. 401)

In Epstein's (2018) call for a "new direction," a core competency of a skilled classroom teacher is their ability to develop and facilitate partnerships. She challenges us, as teacher educators, to re-think what it means to be a well-prepared professional teacher for our 21st century classrooms. She writes:

It is imperative for new teachers to understand family diversities, community resources, student experiences in and out of school, and how to use all available resources to maximise student learning and success. This knowledge and these skills are measures of teachers' professional skills and standing. (Epstein, 2018, p. 401)

Epstein's long developed conclusions regarding the collaborative skills of a well-prepared teacher were recently exemplified by Darling-Hammond and Oakes (2019) in *Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning*. They share a teacher preparation exemplar where "...the aim is to help teachers create relationships with families and learn from their knowledge of the child as well as their experiential *funds of knowledge* more generally" (p. 64).

These notions have much to offer teacher educators who endeavor to be "quick to listen". There is powerful potential for good when different stakeholders in a child's world bring their gifts and expertise to share on behalf of the central goal of helping a child grow and thrive. As our Christian faith interacts with these ideas, we believe that faith-based teacher preparation has a unique perspective that holds promise to

strengthen the preparation of candidates to engage with families and the community of their learners.

This special issue, Volume 14, Issue 2, features both new essays and reprints of pieces from past issues that are relevant to the theme of preparing teacher candidates to work effectively with families and communities. It offers each of us the opportunity to re-imagine the way we prepare our pre-service candidates for the challenges of today's classrooms. Walcott's *Urban-focused and community-based teacher preparation* calls us as Christian teacher educators to prepare candidates who "act justly" to confront educational inequity in society. He posits that Christian teacher preparation programs are uniquely positioned to prepare candidates for work in urban schools. Latunde's *Towards more Inclusive Schools: An Application of Hospitality in Parental Involvement* stretches us to see families as equal partners in the educative process. Ramirez's piece, *Bible Theory or Biblical Living: What are Christian Schools Providing for Families with Children with Special Needs?* reminds us how critical it is that all learner needs are embraced and addressed. Finally, Hughes' *Can Resilience be our Teacher Super-power?* helps us think deeply about preparing candidates that are able to persist when faced with the myriad of challenges associated with working with families as we strive to meet the needs of all children.

This past December, Dr. Scot Headley hosted an ICCTE Journal webinar entitled *Valuing Faith and Family: Impacts on Curricular Design in Teacher Preparation*. The webinar was well attended, and it was clear to us that there is considerable interest among Christian teacher educators in exploring the important role that families and communities hold in the education of children, and in how teachers and teacher educators might facilitate family/community engagement. Thank you for your interest in this important topic. It is our hope that reading through the essays in this special issue of ICCTE-J will prompt some new thinking, research, and writing in this area. The editors of ICCTE-J welcome future research article submissions exploring this, and other areas of teacher preparation, from the perspective of Christian thought and practice.

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