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Parent-Teacher Relationships and the Effect on Student Success

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Abstract

Effective collaboration between educators and parents has become more and more essential to meet the basic needs of our students. This partnership includes parents, families, and teachers working together as a strategy to support students' learning. A partnership such as this requires responsibility from both sides in order to make the required progress. Researchers found children whose parents were identified by teachers as more positively involved had higher levels of prosocial behaviors and more academic success. This demonstrates teachers and parents who work together to empower students could help improve student performance. This literature review will contain peer reviewed, scholarly journals researching the history of family school partnerships and their effect on the overall success of students.

Keywords: Parent-Teacher Relationship, Parental Involvement, Student Achievement

Parent-Teacher Partnerships and the Effect on Student Success

The parent-teacher partnership is considered one of the most important factors for a child's educational success (Landeros, 2011). Achievement in school is critical for improving the likelihood of future life successes. The parent-teacher relationship is more focused on the behaviors' indicative of partnership, collaboration, and alliance between the parent and the teacher (Dawson & Wymbs, 2016). Generally, when parents participate in their children's education, both at home and in school, students demonstrate higher levels of emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment. (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

An important feature of adolescence is the increasing autonomy of young people . However, successful parents maintain an active role in their adolescents' experiences (Steinberg, Brown, and Dornbusch 1996). One example of taking an active role is parental involvement in education, through which parents manage and supervise their adolescents' academic careers, support adolescents' endeavors, and signal their belief in the value of education. This practice, in turn, engages adolescents in the educational process and promotes academic achievement (Hickman, Greenwood, and Miller 1995; Muller 1998).

Research has shown parental involvement in education occurs in many different forms, including Home-Based Involvement, School-Based Involvement and Home-School Collaboration. Home-Based Involvement (i.e., parental ability to support educational development at home and in the community) encompasses educational support initiated by the parent takes place outside of the classroom. School-Based Involvement includes activities which take place within the school, such as a parent volunteering as a teaching assistant or aiding a field trip. Home-School Collaboration refers to relational activities between the family and school, such as parent-teacher conferences. (Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., Perry, M. A., & Childs, S.

2004). Family involvement in education has been identified as a beneficial factor in young children's learning (National Research Council [NRC], 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Theory and research demonstrate effective parent-teacher collaboration is a critical factor in the academic and social-emotional development of students in primary and secondary education (De Bruïne, Willemse, D'Haem, et. al, 2014). This literature review will share the obstacles both teachers and parents face while forming partnerships, the benefits of truly meaningful partnerships, and ways in which educators and schools can foster parental involvement.

Review of the Literature

History

Since the beginning of formal schooling, there has always been some form of collaboration between the home and the school. However, each reform movement in education has led to a change in the relationship between parents and teachers (Reilly, 2008). According to Trotman (2001) parent involvement was designed to create a partnership to allow for greater collaboration between home and school for the expressed purpose of improved student outcomes. Over time, parents have come to be viewed as critical partners in the education of their children. As parent involvement was defined and clarity regarding roles emerged, the dialogue between parents and professionals provided opportunities to develop new and effective strategies for innovative and authentic home–school partnerships (Hiatt, 1994). Lueneburg and Irby (2002) reported parental expectation for their children's achievement—participating in school activities, offering encouragement, and providing home learning environments— produced more positive outcomes for children.

Research demonstrated effective parent-teacher collaboration was a critical factor in the academic and social-emotional development of students in primary and secondary education (Epstein, 2001). More than a decade ago, scholars argued developing productive relationships with families is part of a teacher's professional role; however, creating family-school partnerships can be challenging for teachers (De Bruïne, Willemse, D'Haem, et. al, 2014). Parental involvement in the education of their children has been regarded as an important element of effective education for at least 40 years (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Epstein (2005) discussed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirement of parent involvement in schools; the discussion was from a sociological perspective, which suggested parent involvement should be revamped to allow for more equitable and effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships. State, local, and school authorities must be engaged in professional development programs designed to equip teachers and employees to meet the task of engaging parents on all levels to develop effective partnerships. In 2015, No Child Left Behind Act was replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act (Epstein, 2005).

Parent-Teacher Relationship Quality

Parent-teacher relationship quality refers to the affective quality of the home-school connection, as indexed by trust, mutuality, affiliation, support, shared values, and shared expectations and beliefs about each other and the child (Vickers & Minke, 1995). Lekli (2015) conducted a study determining good communication is central to cooperation and support. The study goes on to discuss the application of strategies which may include parent-teacher conferencing, workshops, periodic student updates, and annual activities to foster parental involvement. The implementation and participation in such strategies by both parents and educators has been shown to enhance student progress, reduce student misbehavior, and increase

lesson efficiency due to a well-managed classroom environment. Educators are responding to increased professional expectations, economic pressures, time constraints and rapid changes, effective collaboration between educators and parents has become more and more essential to meet the basic needs of the pupils. Parents provide children with their first learning experiences, starting with eating, sitting, walking, coloring at kindergarten, writing and reading etc. Therefore, reinforcing a strong parent-teacher partnership would be an in strategy to enhance support of the learning process in an educational institution (Lekli, 2015.)

A study by Vickers & Minke (1995) found when parents and teachers experience conflict students may experience increased behavioral and academic difficulties. Establishing cooperation depends on the culture of the school as well as socio-economic status of the school. Research has shown the inclusion of family contributes to better educational outcomes, improves attendance and increases students' responsibility for fulfilling school obligations (Cankar, Deutsch & Sentocnik, 2012). In its position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] stresses the importance of shared decision making and responding to family choices without abdicating responsibility to support the child's development and learning (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017).

Through her work as an educational assistant Trottier (2016) recommended the following strategies to bring parents into the teacher-student relationship which include: daily conversations as students are coming and going, classroom orientations at the beginning of the year, home visits, regular phone calls for both positive and difficult news, goal setting for children's learning, classroom newsletter (both online and in print), encouraging parents to volunteer, and inviting parents on field trips (Trottier, 2016.) According to Bender (2005) successful teachers were more effective at communicating when they tailor their communication

to fit the situation and use different styles and methods to fit their goals. Effective

communication with parents meant initiating conversations with them early on in the school

year, informing them about significant classroom happenings, updating them regularly on their

child's progress, and encouraging them to participate in school functions (Bender, 2005).

Parent-Teacher Relationship Styles

A student's adjustment to school relies, at least in part, on the practical and emotional

resources made available to him or her over the years from home, school and the wider

community. Both teachers and parents commonly believed in the value of education, want the

best for children and want them to be happy at school (Porter, 2008). Trust is an important

dimension of parent educational involvement and parent-teacher relationships. Preliminary

research suggested parent trust in teachers and schools is associated with student learning and

behavior (Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie & Moore 2016). Partners collaborate in planning,

coordinating, and implementing programs and activities at home, at school, and in the

community build strengths and resilience in children to enhance their academic, personal, social,

and college-career outcomes (Epstein, 1995).

In a professional-driven relationship, teachers viewed the parents as the source for their

child's problems. When students are not progressing adequately teachers within this model often

blame the lack of family support, rather than reflecting on the nature of teaching. Parents are

expected to simply comply with the advice of the teacher. Professional-driven relationships are

characterized by teacher dominance. Educators assessed children's needs, interpreted these to

parents and formulate a suitable program, parents are expected to either defer to professional

diagnoses and comply with their recommendations, or clear the scene to allow the professionals

to get on with their job (Porter, 2008). In a professional-driven relationship engaging with

families is considered a low priority an isn't thought of as being connected to student outcomes (Mapp, Carver & Lander, 2017).

In a family-allied partnership, parents are viewed as a child's first teacher in life. This view recognizes families and parents cannot work in isolation. Educators accept the responsibility to communicate with parents about their child's education, while parents are expected to support the school (Porter, 2008). Engaging with families was seen as a commitment and a key component of a school's functioning. Families were seen as true partners in the teaching and learning process and are valued as knowledgeable and important contributors to school and student improvement (Mapp, Carver & Lander, 2017).

A family-centered relationship placed parents and teachers as equal participants with complementary skills and expertise. The purpose of interacting with parents is to empower them to meet the needs of their child's and family's needs (Porter 2008). Targeted efforts are made to reach out to and invite families to be engaged with a focus on helping families to support their children's learning (Mapp, Carver & Lander, 2017). Kaiser and Rasminsky (2017) named some of the basic ideas behind this family centered approach. For example, families were central to children's lives- their first and main teachers and the experts on their own children. Families have their own strengths, competencies, resources, ways of coping, and goals for their children. Every family must be respected and accepted on its own terms, without judgements or preconceptions. Each family's values, beliefs, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, and socioeconomic status must be acknowledged and respected. Services and programs are effective to the degree they support the family in meeting the needs it has identified (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017).

Obstacles for Parents and Teachers

According to a study done by Gary Hornby and Rayleen Lafaele (2011) extensive literature indicated parental involvement is advantageous for children of all ages. The current reality is there is considerable diversity in the type and degree of parental involvement. Parent and teacher interactions were frequently shaped by differing expectations and vested interests (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Some parents experienced failure, ridicule, and some dropped out before graduation. These negative feelings were projected onto their own children and both the parents and their children become defensive about school. It was important for teachers to convey to these parents, as well as to their children, they care about their students as individuals and they have a genuine concern for the children's welfare (Flynn, 2007) .

Diversity in our schools is continually growing and as a result, language barriers are becoming more problematic. Families do not speak English need teachers to send home notices written in the families' native language, have interpreters available during conferences, or use the parents' extended families to assist in communications between home and school (Inger, 1992). Families face barriers, too, especially those with low income or from different cultures. In today's economy many parents are working one or two jobs. Families may feel intimidated because of a language barrier or the painful memories they carry from their own school experience. Many working-class and low-income families believe school and family lie in separate realms (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017).

A study by Dawson and Wymbs (2016) identified the significance of family-school collaboration citing the need for consistent positive communication. Obstacles to parent-teacher communication did not fall solely on the shoulders of parents. Teachers faced a number of hurdles causing them to be reluctant to contact parents. Teachers may fear parents will be

argumentative when they are contacted. Some teachers are misguided in their belief if they avoid

contacting the parents, they will reduce confrontations (Flynn, 2007). Another reason for

teachers failing to communicate with the family was the teacher's lack of understanding of the

importance of parental involvement and their beliefs about parents' efficacy in improving

academic success (Hoover,-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2002). Teachers with limited life

experienced may know little about a family's daily experience (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017).

However, the most serious obstacle to increasing parental involvement in schools was

the failure of our teacher education programs to adequately train preservice teachers (Epstein,

1995). Teacher education institutes (TEI's) seemed to pay little attention to the preparation of

prospective teachers for family-school partnerships. Many novice teachers see room for

improvement in teacher education, especially in preparing them to work with families (De

Bruïne, Willemse, D'Haem, et. al, 2014). In the 2014 explorative study done by De Bruine,

educators emphasized the lack of time for collaboration and development of shared visions. This

in turn lead to individual unplanned and unconscious practices of educators as found in the study.

In this study of the preparation of pre-service teachers it was determined educators considered

Family School Partnership (FSP) important, but difficult to establish. Preparation for FSP fails if

the concept is not grounded in an understanding of the needs and aims of establishing valuable

partnerships (Epstein, 2001). In a 2005 Harvard Graduate School of Education report it was

found the stress of dealing with difficult parents is one of the top reasons teachers leave the

profession (Emeagwali, 2009).

Benefits of Strong Parent-Teacher Partnerships

Studies have shown when children from low-income backgrounds are exposed to an

emotionally supportive home environment in which academic success is affirmed, their academic

scores improve tremendously (Okpala C., Okpala A. & Smith, 2001). Good communication skills between parents and educators was the key to motivating children's learning and their success at school. Consequently, increased children's motivation and desire in learning means more attention and engagement towards the teaching process, reducing in this way disruptive and undesirable behaviors maximizing in this way the positive climate of a well-managed classroom (Lekli & Kolati, 2015). Parent-teacher collaboration seemed to establish a strong partnership with classroom management highly contributing to the successful ongoing of the teaching process and its positive results (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015).Positive effects included increased academic achievement, improved student attitude towards school, improved behavior, encouragement for students to learn inside and outside of the classroom, and promotes good study habits (Lekli & Kolati, 2015).

When researchers asked parents and professionals what they valued in a partnership, six themes emerged: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017). Parents want their communication with professionals to be frequent, open, and honest, with no sugarcoating or hidden information. They wanted two-way communication and tact- professionals who respect their privacy, do not judge them, and find positive things to say. When teachers took actions to cultivate instructional partnerships with parents, those parents are more likely to support their children's learning at home, and the students of these parents are more likely to be perceived by the teachers as positively involved in classroom learning activities (Olmstead, 2013).

Fostering Parental Involvement

The impact of fostering parental involvement has been well researched. The purpose of the 2013 study by Olmstead was to determine whether emerging technologies facilitate better

parent-teacher communication and parent involvement. Existing and emerging electronic communication technologies may provide the capabilities for schools to increase how parents can be involved in their children's academic lives (Olmstead, 2013). Online textbooks, links to educational websites include games or videos, and teacher websites provide parents with the resources they need to engage in their children's learning at home. Blogs, wikis, and email provide parents with the two-way communication when they need to pull information or respond when needed. While educators must do their part to foster their relationships with parents, schools too must employ strategies to strengthen partnerships with parents (Emeagwali, 2009).

If schools addressed Constantino's (2003) findings, working parents struggling to be involved in their children's academics would benefit by schools utilizing electronic means to communicate with parents. These can include voice-calling systems, websites, email, and parent portals. Voice-calling systems allow parents to keep in touch with the school by having messages sent to their preferred phone number, whether it is a cell phone, work phone, or home phone. Websites, if updated regularly, allow parents access to important news and events about the school. Teacher websites provide parents with homework assignments and class news. Parent portals allow parents to access students' courses, homework assignments, grades, and attendance.

It is the teachers' and school's responsibility to do the utmost in increasing parents' participation and collaboration in their children's education. The school or individual teacher can do several of the following activities. First, the school can plan annual activities early in the school year serve to introduce families and teachers in a positive setting. Next, schools could provide parents with updates of student activity in class and provide parents with ways to support their children. Parent-teacher conferences allow for discussion of student progress (Lekli &

Kaloti, 2015). Schools, educators, and parents can effectively work together to promote positive student outcomes through persistence, patience and goals in mind (Emeagwali, 2009). Schools must employ strategies to forge and strengthen partnerships with parents. The National Network of Partnership Schools at John Hopkins University developed a framework to guide schools in their efforts to do so (Epstein, 2005).

Conclusion

Three decades of research confirm families are engaged in their children's education, children of all ages do better both academically and socially no matter what the family's income or background (Halsgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009). Literature has clearly identified the benefits of parental participation, discussed the most critical parental behaviors, and delineated the obstacles for both the teachers and parents. Educators hold the key to changing the level of parental involvement in a given classroom. Effective communication is crucial in establishing these strong ties between school and home, these two fundamental institutions, equally sharing the responsibility of contributing to the children's progress. Proper preservice teacher training teachers will allow be better prepared with the skill set needed to foster effective relationships with a child's first teacher, their parents.

Ultimately, it is the parent's choice as to the level of involvement they choose to participate in the education of their children. It is important for teachers and administrators to be transparent in communicating to parents the significance of their support. Studies show parental involvement decreases as children begin middle school and into secondary school. By setting a firm foundation of positive interactions, strong communication, and truly meaningful partnerships we will set our children up for success for years to come.

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