

PARENTERAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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UDK: 37.018-056.36-057.874

Abstract

Changes in family and social structure and demographic changes had significantly changed the role of the school in society, and therefore the role of parents in schools' responsibilities. One of the most important thing for good education of the child is the closer partnership between parents and teachers.

The purpose of this study is to present the Model for Conceptualizing Parental Involvement, which was originally designed for teachers and parents of children with special needs, but later was realized that with small adjustments it can be used by all teachers and parents. The model consists of two pyramids, one of them represents the hierarchy of parental needs and the other is a hierarchy of parental strengths and possible contributions. Both pyramids visually demonstrate different levels of needs and contributions of parents.

Research shows that the involvement of parents in the educational process affects very positive for the students, in terms of increased regularity in attending classes, better grades, increased independence, self-esteem, and confidence.

Keywords: *teachers, parents, education, students with disabilities, inclusion.*

Introduction

Most children have two main educators in their lives – their parents and their teachers. Parents are the prime educators until the child attends an early years setting or starts school and they remain a major influence on their children's learning throughout the school.

However, the awareness of the importance of parents, particularly mothers, in their children's education is not a new phenomenon. More than 400 years ago Comenius was writing about the "school of the Mother's lap", arguing that parents should systematically educate their children during the first six years of life. He advocated that mothers should tell stories and rhymes to their young children. For many years, parents, particularly mothers, have been involved in the education of their children at the nursery-school stage (Curtis A., 1998).

For much of the first half of the 20th century, schools were responsible only for academic instruction, whereas families were responsible for emotional and social development (Flexman E., & Inger M., 1991). Up until about 50 years ago the relationship between schools and the home was very hierarchical and procedural. Contact between home and school tended to be much less frequent than is now current, and the main point of parent-teacher contact was usually at 'parents evenings', when teachers would deliver a summary report on a child's progress.

Significant changes have taken place in the period post -1960. Greater awareness as a result of research showing the benefits of good home– school relations, but there was also a change in the relationship dynamic between the two groups.

There is no universal agreement on what parental involvement is, it can take many forms, from involvement at the school (as a governor, helping in the classroom or during lunch breaks) through to reading to the child at home, teaching songs or nursery rhymes and assisting with homework.

This can be categorized into two broad strands:

- Parents' involvement in the life of the school.
- Their involvement in support of the individual child at home (The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education, 2008).

In some schools, there are still educators who say, "*If the family would just do its job, we could do our job.*" And there are still families who say, "*I raised this child; now it is your job to educate her.*" These words embody a view of separate spheres of influence. Other educators say, "*I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the support of this community.*" And some parents say, "*I really need to know what is happening in a school in order to help my child.*" These phrases embody the theory of *overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein JL, 2001). Many reasons exist for family involvement and parent-professional collaboration in the educational process. Sinclair and Christenson (1992), noting that school-home collaboration is integral to the success of students, suggested the following general reasons to support parental involvements:

- Only through collaboration can real change occur. Schools and professionals alone cannot meet the complex, multiple needs of children today.
- Child development and learning does not occur in a single environment and without influence from multiple sources. "Children learn, grow, and develop both at home and at school. There is no clear-cut boundary between home and school experiences for children and youth. Rather, there is a mutually influencing quality between experiences in these two settings" (Sinclair MF., & Christenson SL., 1992).
- The definition of education has expanded with advances in research about human learning and cognition (Wehmeyer M., and all., 2002).

The research has consistently shown that parental involvement in children's education does make a positive difference to pupils' achievement. The Children's Plan published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2007 also highlights the importance of partnership between parents and schools to support children in their learning, and how greater support will be provided for parents to involve them in their child's education (in the early years and throughout school).

Levels of parental involvement vary among parents, for example, mothers, parents of young children, parents of children with a statement of Special Educational Needs are all more likely than average to be very involved in their child's education. The age of children can be a barrier to the involvement of parents since it is widely acknowledged that parental involvement decreases as children grow older and are at its lowest level for children of secondary school age. The tendency for greater involvement of parents of younger children may be partly because younger children are more positive about their parents going into school. Whereas, older children are less keen about school involvement, such as parents going on class trips, which is at least partly due to adolescents wanting to become independent of their parents (Eccles JS. & Harold RD., 1993).

Most of the literature on parental involvement focuses on elementary schools, but the involvement of parents is still regarded as important at secondary school (Wheeler, 1992), and it is widely acknowledged that “Parental involvement has a significant effect on pupil achievement throughout the years of schooling” (DCFS, 2007, p. 5). However, evidence suggests that parental involvement tends to decline throughout the middle school and secondary school years (Hill NE., et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey KV., et al., 2005; Spera C, 2005).

There are at least three possible reasons for this (Chen JJ., 2008; Christenson SL., 2004). *First*, middle and secondary schools may not be as welcoming to parents as elementary schools are. *Second*, parents may be less confident being involved in their children’s education since subject material becomes more challenging as their children progress through middle and secondary schools. *Third*, as children negotiate adolescence and attempt to become more autonomous, they may be less open to having parents involved with their schools (Hornby G., 2011).

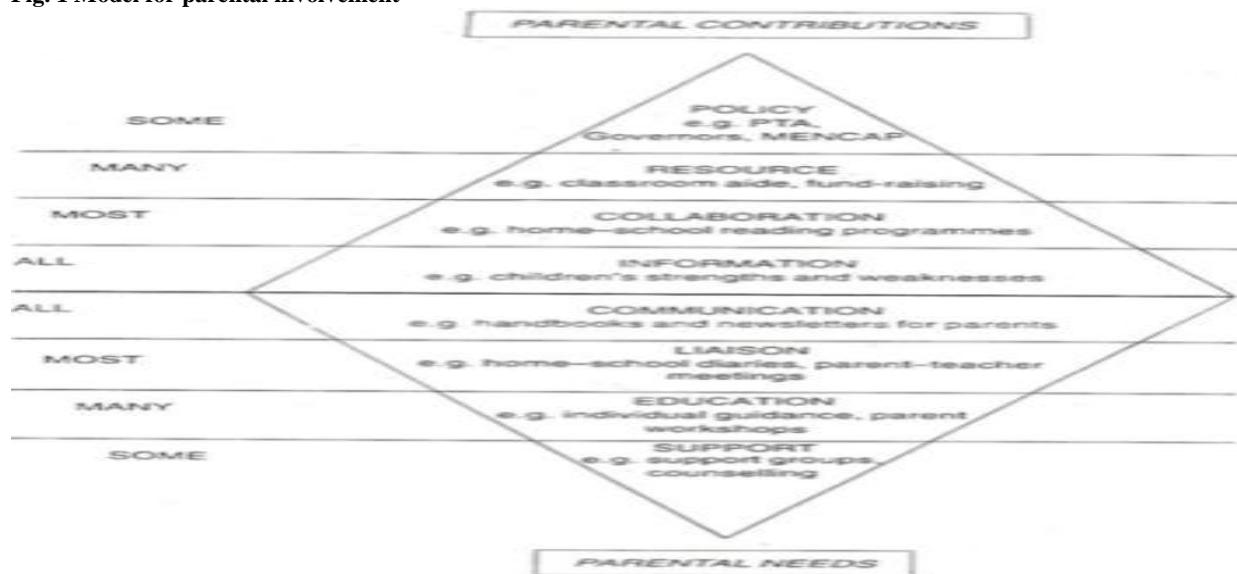
Parental involvement can lead to:

- Higher grades;
- Higher test scores;
- Better attention;
- Increased motivation;
- Lower rate of suspension;
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol;
- Fewer instances of violent behavior;
- Higher self-esteem. (D’Amico J. & Gallaway K., 2010).

Parent and teacher interactions and roles are frequently shaped by differing expectations and vested interests (Wolfendale S., 1983). Parent–teacher meetings provide a good example of how much the goals and agendas of parents and teachers can differ. Bastiani (1989) has suggested that *teachers’ goals* for parent–teacher meetings include discussing children’s progress and any difficulties they are having, finding out from parents how children are coping with school, identifying ways in which parents can help their children at home, and identifying potential conflicts with parents. *Parents goals* for parent–teacher meetings include discussing children’s progress and any difficulties they are having, comparing their children’s progress with that of others in the class, learning more about the school and methods of teaching used, and questioning teachers about any concerns they have (Bastiani J., 1989). So, it is clear that although there are similarities, there are also important differences in parents’ and teachers’ agendas for these meetings, which act as barriers to the establishment of effective parental involvement.

Model for Parent Involvement

The theoretical model for parental involvement described below was developed by combining and adapting existing models (e.g., Bastiani J., 1989; Epstein JL., 2001; Kroth RL., 1985; Lombana JH., 1983; Wolfendale S., 1992) and by gaining feedback from numerous groups of parents, teachers, and other professionals who work in schools. The model was originally devised with teachers and parents of children with SEN in mind (Hornby G., 1989), but it was subsequently realized that, with slight adaptations, it was equally applicable to all parents and teachers (Hornby G., 1990). The model for parental involvement is presented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Model for parental involvement

The model consists of two pyramids connected at the base, one representing a hierarchy of parents' needs, the other a hierarchy of parents' strengths or possible contributions. Both pyramids demonstrate visually the different levels of needs and contributions of parents. Thus, while all parents have some needs and some potential contributions that can be utilized, a smaller number have an intense need for guidance or the capability of making an extensive contribution. Each of the components of the model are outlined and the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to participate in each type of parental involvement are identified.

Parental Contributions

Policy

Some parents are able to contribute as a result of their own experiences through membership of parent or professional organizations. Some have the time and ability to provide in-service training for professionals by speaking at conferences or workshops, or by writing about their experiences (e.g., Featherstone H., 1981). Teachers should continually be on the lookout for parents who can contribute in this way.

Acting as a Resource

Many parents have the time and ability to act as voluntary teacher aides, either assisting in the classroom or in the preparation of materials or in fund-raising. Others may have special skills that they can contribute, such as helping prepare newsletters, in craft activities, or in curriculum areas in which they have a special talent. Some parents may have the time, skills, and knowledge to provide support to other parents either informally or perhaps through participation in self-help or support groups. During these times, teachers should make sure that they make optimum use of this valuable voluntary resource - parents. On other hand, parents may acquire knowledge that is helpful to their understanding of their own children and to gain confidence through helping at school and go on to further their own education.

Collaborating with Teachers

Most parents are willing to contribute in an education of their own child by reinforcing classroom programs at home. This is very important for children with special needs because it is important that the demands made on the children to be more consistent as possible (Dean J., 1996).

McConachie (1986) states: 'Partnership seems to imply equality of parents with professionals in defining intervention strengths and goals, recognizing the different strengths that each side brings to the partnership and what knowledge and perspective each side lacks'. However, some parents are not able to carry out work at home with their children. This can be very frustrating for teachers since they realize that collaboration between home and school results in children making greater progress, so children whose parents do not work closely with them are likely to develop more slowly. However, teachers have to accept that some parents are simply not able to collaborate in this way.

Sharing Information on Children

All parents can contribute valuable information about their children, which can be useful for preparing a plan for meeting their children's needs. Information concerning children's likes and dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses, along with any relevant medical details, can be gathered by teachers at parent-teacher meetings.

Parental Needs

Channels of Communication

All parents need to have effective channels of communication with their children's teachers. They need information about the organization and requirements of the school, about difficulties and reasons for them, as it affects the progress of their child. Also, parents need to know about their rights and responsibilities. This can be provided through handbooks for parents because that will provide them at any time to know their rights and responsibilities. Schools must develop effective written and oral communication skills, through phone, meetings face to face, through e-mail etc.

Liaison with School Staff

Most parents want to know how their children are getting on at school. They want to find out what their children have achieved and whether they are having any difficulties. They regard teachers as the main source of information on their children's performance at school and therefore need to have a working partnership with them. Teachers can facilitate this by keeping in regular contact with parents through such means as telephone calls, home visits, home-school notebooks, weekly report cards and by meeting with parents at school.

Teachers are often disappointed that some parents do not come to parent-teacher meetings at school, thereby giving the impression that they are not interested in how their children are progressing. However, there are usually other reasons for them not turning up, such as the difficulties involved in getting a babysitter, the overwhelming demands of looking after their family, or anxieties about coming to school related to the negative experiences they themselves had at school. It is important then for teachers to find other ways of liaising with these parents, perhaps by having regular telephone contacts or home visits. Therefore, teachers need to develop the skills of conducting formal and informal meetings with parents.

Parent Support

Some parents, at times, are in need of supportive counseling, even though they may not actually request it. This support can be provided either individually or in the group. Some parents will approach their children's teachers in search of guidance or counseling, and teachers should, therefore, have a level of basic counseling skills sufficient to be good listeners and to help parents solve everyday problems. They should also have the knowledge necessary to be able to refer parents to professional counselors when problems raised are beyond their level of competence.

Parent Education

Many parents are interested in participating in parent education programs aimed at promoting their children's progress or managing their behavior. Parent education can be conducted individually or in parent groups. It seems that the most effective format for parent education is one that combines guidance about promoting children's development with opportunities for parents to discuss their concerns (Pugh G., & De'Ath E., 1984).

Conclusion

Part of a teacher's professional success relies on building a strong, open communication with parents. A positive connection between home and school increases the overall success of a child's learning. It is imperative to empower all parents by helping them realize that they are an integral part of their child's education. Parents can offer important insights into their child's study habits, behaviors, health, and general personality characteristics. These factors, which may not be readily apparent in the classroom environment, can have an impact on achievement for both general education and special needs students.

Results of many researches suggest that enhancing parental involvement in a child's schooling relates to overall improved school performance. One reason may be that parents of higher-achieving students set higher standards for their children's educational activities than do parents of low-achieving students (D'Amico J., & Gallaway K., 2010).

We suggest that a theoretical model for parental involvement is needed to assist schools to design policies and procedures for involving parents. The model proposed suggests competencies needed by teachers to ensure its successful implementation. The model is also used to generate a checklist of questions that schools can employ to evaluate their practice of parental involvement in order to identify strengths and areas that need further development.

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