Grow, Inspire, Connect, Nurture, Thrive

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Abstract of Study
This Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project examines effects of parental/teacher collaboration on parental participation. The study incorporated surveys, interviews, blogs, and focus groups from parents in Miami. This data brought forth important aspects of collaboration parents deemed important. We used data to create workshop style meetings to address these deficits.

**Statement of the Problem**

We were compelled to explore factors contributing to the decreasing and increasing of parental involvement in schools and identify solutions that addresses issues during data collection process of this action research project.

Researcher Rosa Berry was shocked to discover in some schools parental involvement is often stifled because of negative school to home interactions and feedback. She developed greater interest in parental involvement when she experienced first-hand rejection some parents receive when they became involved or voice their concerns and opinions about their child’s school.

Researcher Nancy Valdes realized that sometimes teachers overlook facts that some students lack basic academic tools needed to achieve success, which leads to higher rates of dropout and retention. Communication between families and schools help form stronger support systems for students. However, if all parties do not feel welcomed in decision making, then lack of participation continues.

Researcher Ritai Su, is a Chinese international student concerned about current Chinese Left-Behind Children (LBC) who do not have parental support. Findings suggest adolescent LBCs are likely to have health issues, higher dropout rates, higher prevalence of smoking and
drinking behavior (Yang G, 2010). Collaboration with other researchers provides insight on the lack of parental involvement universally.

**Purpose/ Research Question**

This research was designed to study different methods that will increase parent teacher communication. The research questions and methods were formulated to determine whether school to home collaboration positively correlates to student’s effort, academics and participation in school. If parents are empowered to participate, how will that affect students?

**Literature Review**

Most research confirms that communication between parents, schools, and community are essential to an effective educational experience. Schools have a responsibility to invite and welcome parents to resourceful gatherings. Often, in the lower income schools parents feel rejected, isolated, ignored, and uncomfortable. (Bempechat, 1992; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Lawson, 2003; Rich 1987; Trotman, 2001).

Research conducted in an inner-city U.S. elementary school, revealed issues hindering parental involvement are long hours of holding multiple jobs, family responsibilities, inconvenient meeting hours, and negative experiences with school staff (Bartel V. 2010). Parents that speak negative about teachers and administration, reinforces to students same negative behavior that may lead to students disrespectful behavior (Bempechat, 1992; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Lawson, 2003; Rich 1987; Trotman, 2001). This research will focus on finding ways to unite parents, teachers, and schools to build students’ academic success and overall school experience. If teachers initiate discussions with parents about strategies to restore trust, empower parents, and make school home collaboration effective, then a healthier school environment will emerge.
Children who have parental support attend school regularly, receive better grades and have a high percentage of graduating high school. Parents have a central role in influencing their children's progress in school; research shows that schools in turn play an important role in determining levels of parental involvement (Epstein, 2001). Epstein’s five essential elements that help families with parenting skills will be used to facilitate this research. Understanding the needs of families is essential to providing services that increase overall success.

**Research Methodology**

**Participants:**

Twenty-six participants were selected from an urban community in Homestead, Florida. Participants from diverse cultural, languages and background. Some parents were natives of Guatemala, México, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina, and Colombia. Others were African American descent and speak English as first language. 100% of students participating receive free or reduced lunch based on socio-economic status.

**Material:**

Parent informational letter, parent survey, discussion group questions, classroom with projector, computers with internet access, and activity/ information for workshop on standardized test, refreshments for meetings.

**Design:**

Research was written and conducted following PAR routine, structured by stories of personal experience and literature research, academic quantitative research via survey collecting and analyzing was conducted to verify hypothesis.

**Procedure:**
First, parents were invited to an informal classroom discussion. Then, they were given a survey based on Epstein’s work and School, Family and Community Partnerships research. This survey has been used by schools in Miami-Dade County School District and recommended by administration from schools in this study. Parents attended voluntary workshop/training about standardized test and best practices to help children at home. Blog questions were created based on CNN Students News Interviews by Carl Azuz in 2010. We formulated similar questions to compare and cross-reference the findings of the interview to feedback from the blog.

**Findings/ Results**

Major findings of the study is that parents are not aware of how to get involved in their child’s school. Parents expressed they had negative experiences with school organized groups, PTA (Parent, Teacher, Association) and EESAC (Educational Excellence School Advisory Council). Some of the parents, did not know when EESAC or PTA meetings took place. 80 percent of parents responded they would attend meetings if held at convenient times and not facilitated by school administration. We concluded parents are hesitant to become involved at their child’s school because of previous internal threats imposed by administration or staff which was suggested in a study done by Virginia B. Barter on “Home and School Factors Impacting Parental Involvement In A Title I School”.

During workshops parents were provided hands on strategies to assist with best home learning practices. Prior to the parent sessions, a small percentage of students turned in homework and projects. After intervention, percentage of students turning in projects increased. Grades improved and effort was recognizably noticeable.
Lack of communication and collaboration between administration and parents has to be improved for positive relationships to emerge. Additional research needs to be put into how schools can help parents feel welcome.

**Implication for the field**

As teachers we decided to investigate parent, teacher, and community collaboration because we strongly believe in the old saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” Community-school partnerships can improve students’ achievement, at the macro level of school structure and function, and micro level of classroom culture and content (Watson, V., 2012).

This PAR project was facilitated by researcher’s personal experience, it added real-life perspective and angle to holistic research towards Parental Involvement in schools. Our research uses inductive and deductive research methods that may contribute to future research under the same topic.

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