

Parental Involvement in School Readiness Programs

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Abstract

It is important for young children to have ready to go to school while they are in kindergarten. A good method to help children have enough school readiness is parental involvement. There is a lot of experience of both theories and also practice showed in this essay, to help kindergarten teacher and parents know how to increase parental involvement in education for good school readiness for young children.

Key words: Parental involvement; School readiness; Early childhood education

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INTRODUCTION

Educational researchers have long acknowledged that a child's success in school is dependent upon an interaction of school, environmental, familial and societal factors. In order to accomplish the optimal outcomes in a child's educational life, these forces must collaborate in designing instruction and social and physical support programs that would enhance children's cognitive and social development throughout their lifespan. Research has consistently demonstrated that the involvement of parents in a child's education, and their fruitful collaboration with teachers can have a positive and lasting impact on their child's academic and socio-emotional success.

As a result, several programs have been developed at the federal and state levels that encourage greater

communication and collaboration among teachers and parents (e.g., Izzo et al., 1999). These efforts are being emphasized particularly in the first five years of a child's life when many have postulated that parent's influences will have the most lasting effects (Reynolds, 1991; Izzo et al., 1999; Anderson et al., 2003). However, there are reports of low parental participation and retention in these programs (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005).

1. SCHOOL READINESS

Researchers estimate that approximately 40% of students entering kindergarten are not ready (Fielding, 2006). There is no one comprehensive definition of school readiness. Anderson et al. (2003) highlight cognition, language, physical health, and social and emotional development as essential components. A comprehensive definition of school readiness takes into account preparation of children for school in various areas of development. These developmental areas are physical, language and literacy, other areas of cognitive development, social and emotional development, approach to learning and the ability to focus on a task (Emig, 2001). Connel and Prinz (2002) suggest that the home and childcare settings are the most influential environments during these early years.

Educators have noticed that children enter elementary school with varying levels of competence. According to data reported by Wertheimer, Croan, Moore and Hair (2003), among kindergarteners, 31% had physical and/or health challenges and poor social and emotional development. Additionally 20% were lagging behind in their cognitive development.

2. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Factors impacting parent involvement. Certain factors have been shown to contribute to some children being less

ready than others. Some of the correlates of poor cognitive competence, physical health, social and emotional development and language deficiencies are having a mother who has not attained a high school education, poor socioeconomic status, single-parent families and having parents with limited English competence (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Dunlap and Alva (1999) also support that the parent's education and language competence can impact their willingness and ability to participate in their child's education in addition to living in a poor, crime-ridden community and non-native status. Having multiple jobs may make it difficult to balance work with obligations to the child's school (McCroskey, 2002). Parents working multiple jobs are usually from low-income families and tend to be less involved in their children's education (Reynolds as cited in Izzo et al., 1999).

Effects of parental involvement. Fontaine et al. (2006) did a comprehensive review of literature examining the role of parental involvement in student performance. The studies indicated that parental involvement in their children's learning, both within the home and at school, resulted in improved student motivation to learn. Thus children whose parents took an active interest in their education exhibited more effort in school, had higher concentration, and paid more attention in class. Students were also more intrinsically motivated to learn, took greater responsibility for their own learning and exhibited a higher perceived competence.

Dunlap and Alva (1999) agree that the task of ensuring that children are ready to enter kindergarten should not be left up to the school alone. They discovered a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement and attendance, and a negative correlation between parental involvement and student dropout rates. Izzo et al. (1999) found that the frequency and quality of parental involvement were positively correlated with improvements in school performance. However, parental involvement was not sustained on a long-term basis. Parents were more involved in their child's early education and were less involved as the child progressed to higher grades.

3. RELEVANT POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

In the early 1990s, the government solidified its commitment to ensuring that children entering kindergarten are ready to succeed in its declarations under Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This goal projected "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (as cited in Crawford, 2007, p.3). To accomplish this goal schools were mandated, among other things, to optimize parental involvement in the social, emotional and academic development of their children by

devising appropriate inclusive school readiness programs (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005)

Even older than the Goals 2000 Act is the government's commitment as was demonstrated in its early childhood education program through Project Head Start and Early Head Start. Head Start has been around for over 40 years and has since served well over 20 million children along with their families. The Early Head Start program targets children from zero to three while Head Start targets those from three to five years old. The federal government provides funds to the tune of approximately \$7 billion annually to grantees who agree to meet the federally prescribed Head Start Standards.

Research has shown that children from low-income families who went through the Head Start program were better prepared to enter school. The performance gap between students from low-income and higher income families was narrowed by 45% in pre-reading and 28% in pre-writing. Research also indicates that Head Start children are less likely to access special education services, repeat grades, get involved in delinquent adolescent behaviors later on or graduate from high school (USDHHS, 2007). In an effort to further strengthen, this program the government introduced another program – Good Start, Grow Smart (GSGS). GSGS seeks to strengthen Head Start, improve early childhood education delivery and to provide resources and information for stakeholders including caregivers, parents and educators.

4. CURRENT STUDY

This will be an exploratory study gathering both qualitative and quantitative data to determine parental involvement patterns and predictors. Previous researchers have tended to assess parent participation from the reports of teachers (Izzo et al., 1999; Fontaine et al., 2006). This dual-sample study will allow the researcher to consolidate assessments of parent involvement from two perspectives-teachers and parents. This study will ask respondents to describe how they participate and why. Additional measures will be used to assess the parent's motivation to participate, and delineate what incentives might be useful to encourage them to participate. Other researches have tended to examine the rate of parental involvement and the ways in which parents are involved. The motivations behind parental involvement should be multifaceted (Fan & Chen, 2001); however not much research has examined the motivations for being involved. This research will adopt this approach by seeking to understand the reasons parents give for participating and remaining in school readiness programs and will therefore be able to predict retention and persistence rates.

The objectives of the study are:

To determine the level of parent participation in school readiness;

- a) To decipher the ways in which parents participate in school readiness programs;
- b) To estimate the quality of parental participation;
- c) To classify the motivations for parental participation and non-participation in school readiness programs;
- d) To estimate the rate of retention and participation in parents based on the motivating factors.

5. METHODS

Participants. The population will be selected based on the registration details of children enrolled in Head Start program. Parents of children enrolled in Head Start as well as their teachers will be included in the study. In order to be eligible for this study, parents must have only one child age zero to five that was registered in Head Start between September and December of 2007. The child must not have any known physical or cognitive disability nor any serious illnesses or conditions. Also, the child's attendance must be regular. All participants must be able to provide written voluntary informed consent, which will be given in both Spanish and English.

Sampling. The database of the US Department of Health and Human Service, the official home of the Head Start program, will be used to gather data on Head Start Institutions in the state of California. Two Head Start compliant centers in each of the 58 districts will be randomly chosen from the database to represent a total of 116 institutions. Institutions offering special education services will not be considered in this survey.

A proportionate number of teachers will be recruited. With the consent of the administration in each school 20% of the parents of children registered at the institution will be recruited. Ten percent will be made up of parents enrolled in school readiness programs and the other ten percent are those who are not enrolled. Close examination of school records and administrative support will facilitate this process.

All 58 districts in the state of California will be sampled. Each district will be represented by two centers each. The centers will all be institutions that are funded by the government under the Head Start initiative.

6. MEASURES

Survey. A researcher constructed survey will be administered to both teachers and parents. The surveys will be available in both Spanish and English to account for the large Spanish-speaking population in California's Head Start population. The surveys will consist of several close-ended Likert-type scale questions that will enable

parents and teachers to respond on a scale of "strongly-agree" to "strongly-disagree" to various statements. There will also be a few open-ended questions that will enable parents and teachers to elaborate on some of the close-ended responses. Separate surveys will be administered to the parents and teachers. Questions will be similar but would be worded slightly differently to suit the respondent type.

The teacher's questionnaire will collect demographic data such as years of teaching experience and perceived parental involvement in school and home activities with child. It will also ask for the teacher's perspective on reasons why parents participate in school readiness programs. It will ask them to distinguish between high-participation and low-participation parents in terms of several demographic, lifestyle and personality characteristics.

The parent's questionnaire will ask about demographic information such as salary, age, education, sex, and ethnicity. The survey will also assess the amount of the parent's current participation both at the center and at home, and the parent's satisfaction with their participation status. Other questions will assess the how much the parents value the program and their commitment toward their child's education. It will then ask questions related to what barriers get in the way of their current participation as well as suggestions on internal and external ways to overcome these barriers. The survey will then address the issue of incentives, and ask whether giving incentives would increase their participation, and if so, what type, and what quantity.

Interview. Interviews will be conducted with the parents to augment the findings of the surveys. The interviews will serve as an opportunity for the researchers to ask parents in-depth questions about their motivations surrounding their level of participation in the school readiness program. Questions will focus on ideal situations, and if parents could have "three wishes that could increase their participation in their child's school readiness program, what would they be?"

7. PROCEDURE

Consent will first be obtained from the administrators of each of the centers randomized in the districts. Written informed consent will also be obtained from the participating parents and teachers requesting them to participate in the survey. Participants will be informed of the exact nature and purpose of the research and assured that the data will only use for the purpose stipulated.

After letters from the researchers explaining the experiment have been disseminated to both parents and teachers, the researcher will visit each site to administer the surveys to the teachers and give the teachers surveys to hand out to the parents. Parents will be instructed both

on the front of the survey on by the teachers to return the surveys upon completion to the teachers in an envelope supplied by the researcher. The researcher will then schedule appointments to revisit the site to conduct both the teacher and parent interviews while at the same time collect the parent surveys. If it is more convenient for the parents, the researcher will make home visits to conduct the interviews.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

The following variables will be examined:

- a) Level of participation in school readiness.
- b) Forms/type of parental participation (home & school).
- c) Perceived quality of participation.
- d) Reasons for participation/non-participation in school readiness programs.
- e) Rate of retention.

The statistical program SPSS®15.0 will assist in the analysis of the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics –mean, mode, and median will be used in analyzing the demographic characteristics of parents, the level of participation and the amount of parents who would have started but are no longer involved in school readiness programs. *T*-tests will analyze the level of motivation between both between both groups of parents—enrolled and not enrolled in order to determine the impact motivation has on participation and retention. ANOVA analysis will also be used to determine the group comparison motivation rates of parents.

Pearson’s correlation will be used to determine the correlation between the information supplied by the parent with respect to involvement in their child’s education and the information supplied by the teachers to determine if the self-reports are accurate.

Content analysis will be used to analyze the qualitative data. A holistic list of the individual motivators will be generated. Responses will be compared and matched for duplications. Preliminary categories of similar motivators will be created based on the transcripts from the quantitative instrument. These preliminary categories will later be reexamined using cross-case analysis to remove duplications. The list of motivators will then be presented and organized into their specific content categories. Person correlations will then be used to assess the associations among parental characteristics and involvement in school readiness programs.

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