

Home-School Partnership in Kindergarten

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Abstract: A survey on home-school partnership practices among kindergarten teachers in both public and private schools in Cebu was the focus of this study. A quantitative method of research was utilized with the use of percentage analysis to determine the most common practices among respondents in terms of the parental partnership. 30 kindergarten teachers in different schools were asked to answer the questionnaire which was based on Epstein's types of involvement. Findings revealed that teachers and parents have established open communication as one of the partnership practices. However, other types of partnership which are equally significant are not given much attention. Thus, home-school partnership in the kindergarten classroom nowadays still needs to be strengthened in order to be functional and sustainable. Parents and teachers need to be reoriented on their roles and be capacitated to be able to effectively collaborate to promote students' success in school.

Key Words: Home- school partnership; Kindergarten; Parental involvement; Collaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Early Childhood Educators greatly believe in the importance of establishing a solid foundation in the early years of education among learners. The values, skills, and knowledge they acquire in these early years have an impact on their success in life. Therefore, it is important for educators and parents to maximize the learning experiences of learners in these critical years. One way to realize this is an effective partnership between parents and teachers because of the connection between the two benefits children's learning in all areas (Epstein, 2001). In this study, the researcher explores the home-school partnership practices specifically in the Kindergarten classrooms in the Philippines.

Several studies have revealed the positive impact of home-school partnership. According to Christenson & Sheridan (2001), when efforts are exerted by both families and schools to support the learning of the children, there is a slim chance of failure among children in school. As stated by Epstein (2005), effective home-school connections increase motivation to learn among children. She further emphasized that specific partnership is beneficial for the development of foundation skills that are needed for academic success and is continually affecting the children's lives. Further, a home-school partnership is considered as a significant indicator of academic success. In the study of Henderson and Berla (1994), they emphasized that student's achievement does not rely on family income or status but rather on the ability of the parents to guide and help in the academic activities of their children. Christenson (2004) noted that family involvement is significantly affecting student achievement in all strata and in all education levels. This is one of the reasons why parent-teacher collaboration is highly significant. In addition, the study of Mc Wayne et al (2004), indicated that children with highly involved parents have higher levels of social skills. These children also demonstrated great self-control and more cooperative in all settings. Moreover, their reading and mathematics performance is greater compared to those children with less involved parents. Aside from the positive effects of teacher-parent partnership to the academic success of the students, it has also developed positive behavior among students, in the study of Sheldon (2007), he noted that well-planned activities and school programs that encourage parental involvement has increased student's attendance in school. The above-mentioned studies just indicated the positive results of a parent-teacher partnership.

Almost all educators and researchers agree with the significant contributions of the involvement of home in students' journey to success however implementing such entails some challenges. According to Epstein (2001), families wanted to assist their children in all academic activities however they lack skills in doing so. Other reasons are families wait for the school to make the first initiative in terms of building partnership and lastly, parents lack the knowledge on forging collaboration with schools. Other reasons for parents not being involved in their children's education are a busy schedule with work and unpleasant school experiences (Christenson, 2004). These can be both personal and psychological. Most of the parents nowadays are both working that is why demanding time out of their work is difficult. This can also be psychological due to their own experiences when they are still in school. If parents have an unpleasant experience before, being in school might give them uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, another reason for parents not being involved in school can be also cultural (Pena, 2000). In other culture, questioning the school's rules and decisions might be considered disrespectful. Lee (2005), narrated that Korean parents refrain from expressing their

concerns to teachers and administrators. When they do so, it is done in a very polite manner. In addition, according to Broussard (2003) to establish an effective partnership between home and school, teachers need the skills on building family partnership and working effectively with the families before they enter the field of teaching. They need also to understand the cultural backgrounds of the different families they are working with.

It is established that parent-teacher partnership is beneficial to students and realizing this is quite interesting and challenging that is why it is necessary to look into the practices of the schools and specifically the first-hand implementors which are the teachers. Schools must understand that the success of the establishment of the partnership relies heavily upon them (Knoff & Raffaele, 2000). Epstein, (2001) emphasized that in order to have a collaborative teacher-parent partnership, specific roles of both parents and teachers must be clarified first. Schools must not forget that they have a specific role to play when it comes to bringing in parents in the educational journey of their children and so with their parents. One specific role is the development of the partnership between teachers and parents. This partnership is significant for the parents to be guided and supported in their quest in taking part in the education of their children (Broussard, 2003). Broussard further emphasized that parents need guidance and support on what and how to teach and facilitate the children in learning skills and values and that they can get this information through parent-teacher partnership. Parents need the skills in teaching their children because no matter how good teachers are or how excellent their strategies in teaching knowledge, skills, and values in school are, still, parents need to follow-up and enrich these skills at home to ensure meaningful learning (de Jong & Leseman, 2001).

The cooperation between schools and families are needed to establish a good partnership. Epstein (2001) proposes six types of involvement which can be very beneficial to have a strong, functional and sustainable home-school partnership. These are the following: (1) Parenting: This includes assisting the families in their parenting roles, providing information for their understanding of the growth and development and helping on the strategies in assisting and supporting learning. (2) Communicating: This deals with how the partners (home and school) communicate with each other. The establishment of the two-way communication channel in order to communicate clearly is a must. (3) Volunteering: This concerns the volunteer works of the families in school or community. (4) Learning at Home: This involves the strategies and ways of the families in guiding learning at home like in making homework, projects and the like. (5) Decision making: This accommodates families as important stakeholders in the school and should be part of the planning, decision making, and in advocating activities through organizations of the parents like the Parent-Teacher Association. (6) Collaborating with the Community: This involves coordinating with other agencies with the services available for the families. This model of involvement can be very useful for schools to organize programs to foster home-school collaboration. This study is anchored on this typology of involvement, the researcher explores the practices of the teachers based on the mentioned types of involvement. Results of the study can be helpful in framing programs which can enhance the home-school partnership practices among Kindergarten teachers in the Philippines.

2. METHOD:

This study utilized the descriptive survey method. The respondents were the 30 Kindergarten teachers who were randomly selected among other early childhood teachers in Cebu City, Philippines. Validated researcher-made questionnaire and interview guide which was based on Epstein's six types of parental involvement were used. The questionnaires were given to the respondents to gather the necessary data. The informal interview was done to further validate and clarify the responses of the respondents. Percentage analysis was used to analyze the data.

3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS:

Table I. Parental Involvement Practices Among Kindergarten Teachers



The study revealed that the highest partnership practice is Communicating. Kindergarten teachers and parents have established open communication channels. This means that information on school activities and feedback of children's development and behaviour are communicated clearly to parents. Conferences regarding students' performance and progress are discussed every grading period. This result is in consonance with the findings of Ghaith et. al (2012) on the partnership practices of counselors and parents. They noted that counselors are always giving information to families about student's performance and status in school. Further, in the study of Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) the frequent family-school contact through open communication in the preschool years was noted. The families are more eager in taking account in their children's performance since they are still young. In addition, this study divulged that information on policies, programs, and activities of the schools are clearly discussed with the parents. Teachers welcome the opinion of the parents relating to the education of the children. The parents also are embracing the fact that it is their responsibility to share their opinion to the school when it comes to their children's education. However, it can also be noted in this study that though communicating was the highest practice among teachers, still a number of teachers indicated of not doing so. This can be traced to the individual personal commitment and culture of the teacher or the school. In some cases, although teachers acknowledge the importance of certain practices, they still are unable to put these into action (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Three types of involvement are often practiced although only above 50 % of the respondents are narrating that they practice the following: Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with the Community. Learning at home emphasizes giving the necessary information to the parents on some effective ways and means in guiding children in their learning at home. Teachers have narrated that they have suggested to the parents some procedures in helping their children however for the monitoring if the parents have actually done them is beyond their control. This is a good practice for teachers to provide information to parents on strategies of helping their children. Parents need this information because according to some researches, parents wanted to be involved in their children's education but they lack the necessary skills (Epstein, 2001; Dimling et.al, 2011; Broussard, 2003).

In decision making, it means taking parents into account on important decisions to be made concerning school matters. It also encourages and hones good parent leaders. This is evident through the active Parent- Teacher Association. However, in most cases, PTA role is limited to providing financial aids to some school activities. Crafting the curriculum, ensuring the safety of the school oftentimes is handled by the school only. This is supported by the study of Rahabav & Que (2013) that the home-school partnership is limited to a pragmatic necessity, like the fees to be collected on a monthly basis. Parents are often excluded in the matter of curriculum designing and budgetary decisions. Schools need to think creative ways to involve parents, all parents have something to contribute, it is up to the school to motivate and encourage them (Wanat, 2010). Some key elements to effective school program for partnership are the identification and being responsive to the needs of the school and home environment (Durisic & Bunjevac, 2017). These should be the guiding points of the schools.

Collaborating with the community is somehow evident when other government agencies would collaborate with the school to provide services. Most evident here is the health, civic and cultural services through the Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development and the local government. But most often it is the mentioned government agencies who are initiating the partnership with the school because it is easier for them in terms of the beneficiaries. For example, it is easier for the Department of Health to implement their vaccination programs in school since they have the captured beneficiaries already. It is also easier for the Department of Social Welfare and Development to monitor the attendance in the school of their beneficiaries of a special program. Hence, collaboration with the community is evident. This disagrees with the findings of Ghaith et.al (2012) where the school counselors failed to collaborate with potential agencies outside the school. In order for the counselors to be successful in partnership, they need to establish first the amiable school collaborative climate and make sure to put in place the principal's expectations (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Mutual respect and trust are important keys to establish a welcoming collaborative climate in schools (Evans & Radina, 2014).

The other rarely practiced type of involvement is Parenting. This means that efforts to help parents in their parental roles are barely visible. Meaning school is relying on the parents to support their children in all means but helping the parents in doing their responsibility is not so evident. This could be attributed to the lack of skills of teachers or the schools to capacitate the parents in helping their children. According to Broussard (2003), teachers need to be equipped with necessary skills specifically in building a partnership with parents before they join the field of teaching. However, it is evident that teachers have limited training on this aspect, as the result of the study of Hindin (2010), that noted the missing understanding of the teachers to be to the fact that teachers need to provide opportunities, information, and guidance to parents to foster effective involvement. A non-inclusion of any of the coursework for the development of skills and limited knowledge in building a systematic partnership with families (Patte ,2011; Bartels & Eskow, 2010). Hence, it is a must that specific training for this is included in initial training for professionals like the teachers and school staffs who are consistently in contact with the families and children (Webster-Stratton & Bywater, 2015). Furthermore, schools who have responsive home-school partnership could have helped the parents in parenting like seminars, parent education or providing resources to help parents in their parenting. They could have established family

support programs for families like in health, nutrition, and family literacy to assist all families. It is clear that there is a need for the teachers and the schools to revisit their practices in this matter for the betterment of home-school partnership.

The lowest partnership practice is volunteering. This means that parents' help and support inside the classroom is not fully utilized. It is clear that schools have not implemented specific program that encourages volunteerism among parents. This agrees with the findings of Crea et.al (2015) where parents are low in parent engagement activity like volunteering. Most of the parents said that they are involved behind the scenes but not really engaging directly with school personnel nor present in the classroom. On the other hand, in this study, it is revealed that only during "Brigada Eskwela" (a program of the Department of Education every beginning of the school year) when parents help in preparing the school premises for the opening of classes. Other than this, there is limited opportunity for the parents to help in the operations in the school. This can be due to some factors like beliefs, availability and willingness of the parents, school openness for the services of parents inside school premises and the clear volunteer program policies. In the study of Ludicke & Kortman (2012), parents understanding of involvement does not include considerable participation inside the school premises such as classroom volunteers. This may be the reason why this activity is not commonly observed in schools. Additionally, one of the hindrances of parent's involvement in their busy schedule at work. Negative experiences of parents in school is also a factor (Christenson, 2004).

This study has revealed the practices of the Kindergarten teachers in terms of partnership with the families in the selected schools in the Philippines. The results would be the basis of the researcher for the next steps of action to enhance the current practices. An action plan or a program will be crafted and hopefully be implemented. And then, an evaluation of the program will be done.

4. CONCLUSION:

Teachers and parents have established open communication. However, other types of partnership which are equally significant are not given much attention. Thus, home-school partnership in the kindergarten classroom nowadays still needs to be strengthened in order to be functional and sustainable. Parents and teachers need to be reoriented on their roles and be capacitated to be able to effectively collaborate to promote students' success in school.

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