

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

Anne Adamson, M.Ed.
Linda M. McKay, Ph.D.
Faculty of Education
University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4 CANADA

email: anne.adamson@gecdsb.on.ca
lmckay@uwindsor.ca

phone: 519-253-3000 Ex. 3819

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

ABSTRACT

A review of the literature and research has shown that parental involvement was associated with student success. Parents were found to be first and arguably the most influential educators of their children, taking responsibility for their children's physical, emotional and mental well being for future learning. By creating a positive learning environment at home and establishing high expectations for their children, parents laid the groundwork for subsequent achievement at school. Upon entering school, teachers and principals became involved in the education of children. Both families and professionals had important roles to play in the educational development of children and youth (Norris, 1999). The question of parent and community involvement in schools has been the subject of much literature over the past 30 years and although this literature appeared to be contradictory and confusing, one message came through consistently: the closer the parent was to the education of the child, the greater the impact on the child's development and achievement (Fullan, 2001).

Parent's confidence that they were able to help their children with homework and parent's view of their own competence to help their children changed as the children progressed through the grades, encountering increasingly specialized areas of study. Parents felt less able to help their children with schoolwork when it became more advanced, as children for the most part were no longer working on basic language and math skills in higher grades. There was mounting evidence in the literature that specific school and teacher practices were major factors influencing the amount and extent to which parents felt able and comfortable in helping their children with schoolwork.

Current levels of school-family partnerships were assessed from a framework developed by Epstein (1986, 1991, 1997) of six types of parent involvement. These types were:

(1) basic obligations of families to provide for the safety and health of their children

(2) basic obligations of schools to communicate with families about school programs and the individual progress of their children

(3) parental involvement at school

(4) parental involvement in learning activities at home

(5) parental involvement in decision-making at school

(6) collaboration and exchange with community organization.

Type (4) learning at home, resulted in greater gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and class work, improved homework completion, a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and a better self-concept as an able learner for students. Parents supported, encouraged and helped students at home, gained an appreciation of the teacher's skills and an awareness of the child as a learner. Teachers designed better homework assignments, exhibited greater respect of family time, and reported increased satisfaction with family involvement and support.

The study identified potential benefits of parent involvement in children's learning activities at home: increased student confidence in academic abilities, increased student understanding and problem-solving abilities in various subject areas, increased organizational and independent working skills, and an identification with an academic and social community of others who do homework.

Dr. Linda McKay,
Faculty of Education
University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 Ext. 3819