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Understanding How Social/Cultural Difference
and Systematic Factors Inhibit the Formation of
Partnership between Elementary School
Teachers and Families.



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Senior Research Paper

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Abstract

The purpose of this senior capstone project is to examine the factors that inhibit the formation of relationships between teachers' and their students' families. In this study, both social and cultural factors are examined as well as the support given by teacher preparation programs to promote these relationships. This information was gathered through literature review as well as interviews done with pre-service and in-service teachers, parents, previous educators who are both remaining in the education field, as well as those who have retired. The results concluded that both parties have past experiences that play a big role in the inhibition of forming successful teacher-family relationships. In addition, understanding their past experience is important in taking the next steps towards building and promoting the formation of collaborative relationships between parents and teachers followed by some suggestions on how to remedy some of these inhibitions. It is important to continue finding ways to promote and support the formation of these relationships to ensure the success of our students through collaborative relationships and family engagement in each student's academics.

Introduction and Background

Throughout my career as a college student at California State University, Monterey Bay, I have heard little to no emphasis placed on creating strong relationships with our students' families let alone how to do so. In a lot of my service learning sites as well, I did not hear advice given as to how or why it is beneficial to create strong relationships with our students' families. This may be true for my education however; in speaking with any professional, it is apparent how important forming these relationships are not only to the students, but also the structure of the school and its classrooms. In examining what inhibits strong relationships from being built between elementary school teachers and families today, it is apparent that many factors come into play. Growing up, I remember my mother being very heavily involved in my classroom. However, I have seen very little parent presence in many classrooms that I have been in to date. Through my research, I have chosen to frame these inhibitions through social differences and systematic factors.

As I mentioned before, I have not learned much during my college career of how to engage families into my prospective classroom, nor have I seen this modeled at any service learning placement sites. A lack of relationship between the families and the teacher can ultimately endanger the quality of education for the children. Research shows that family engagement matters when it comes to student success. Family engagement has been defined as “a dynamic, interactive process [between teachers and families] that provides a pathway to student success” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010, p.2). The Harvard Family Research Project also states that family engagement has been shown to “improve school readiness, student achievement, as well as social skills” (p.2). As a prospective teacher, this project will help me to identify the possible social and systemic reasons as to why families are not actively engaged in their children's classrooms through collaboration with the teachers. Along with looking

at the families' responsibilities, I wanted to also examine what social and systematic factors play a role in why teachers may not feel or be prepared to build these relationships. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2008) states, "In the last quarter century, social scientists have become increasingly interested in documenting the complex interactions between schools and the families they serve.... And almost every study of school achievement has included at least a rhetorical bow to the importance of positive relationships between families and schools, even though there has been little suggestion of how these alliances might be supported and sustained" (p. 2). Bringing awareness to the lack of "framework" provided to prospective and in-service teachers for building relationships with families, can help me to become a more conscious teacher in making sure that I am building these relationships. In making sure the effort is placed in establishing these relationships, I hope to produce a more collaborative learning environment in my classroom that can help to produce more productive and successful students.

Again, the purpose of this project is to examine the factors that inhibit the formation of relationships between teacher's and their students' families. In this study, both social and cultural factors are examined as well as the support given by teacher preparation programs and federal and state standards to promote these relationships. I have framed my research through the following questions:

The primary research question I wish to explore is:

How do social difference and systematic factors inhibit the formation of partnership between elementary schools and families?

The secondary research questions I am posing are:

1. *What does research say about the social difference and systematic factors that inhibit a close partnership between elementary school teachers and families?*

- a. *What are the causes that create barriers between elementary school teachers and families?*
2. *How does the system (teacher preparation programs and state or federal standards) affect teachers' process in forming relationships with students' families?*
3. *Do past social and/or educational experiences of the parents and teachers play roles in how, or even whether or not, these relationships are formed?*
 - a. *How do the social differences of families and teachers past schooling affect the formation of their relationship?*
 - b. *What hesitations do teachers have and which biases do families bring to their relationships?*

Literature Review

It is widely studied that parent involvement in the classroom can greatly impact the success of not only their children but also the classroom as a whole. The means by which families engage usually varies and is typically initiated by an educator who is conscious of the impacts families have on their students' academics. However, all too often in present times, because of various social, economic, and systemic reasons, this is not taking place. Families are busier and times are harder. Teachers are less worried about the family involvement and more on the test scores. It is important to take a conscious look at why the importance of parent involvement and teacher initiation is only being talked about, and less often, enforced and exhibited.

Law & Legislation. President Barak Obama, in his State of the Union in 2010, made clear to the nation about the importance of supporting our education system. Since Obama's original campaigning days, he made it clear that one of his greatest priorities was to fix the education system in America. In his State of the Union stated "and so the question is whether all of us- as citizens, and as parents- are willing to do what is necessary to give every child a chance to

succeed. That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities” (Obama, 2011, p.1). In Obama’s education plan, *Race To The Top*, he explicitly outlines his beliefs of how impactful parent’s involvement is on their student’s success in school. In Obama’s efforts to turn around the low performing schools in our nation, who were previously deemed this through standardized testing under *No Child Left Behind*. Through an all-inclusive approach, he includes the increased desire for parental involvement. The one problem is, his policy does not reflect this desire. Although *Race To The Top*, outline many other national standards, when it comes to the teacher’s job of engaging the student’s parents and families. These standards are left up to the districts and states to decide. This has proven ineffective because districts and states see test scores and federal funding as the priorities on their agendas. In this sense, although Obama has voiced his opinion and desire for parent-teacher collaboration in our nations education system, he has not made this a requirement.

Other organizations, such as the United States Education Department, National Parent-Teacher Association, Harvard Family Research Project, and Project Appleseed, also voice their opinions on how important parent-teacher collaborations are to our students’ success. These organizations have attempted through the Family Engagement in Education Act to implement policy to increase parent involvement, and hold teachers accountable for helping establish and maintain these relationships. Their hopes are to add more specific national standards regarding family engagement to the education system (Parental Information and Resource Center [PIRC], 2010). However, a number of their efforts were not supported and eventually were shut down. This lead to a lot of the information they provide to be accessible only on the Internet. This poses a problem for families in low-income areas, such as La Bamba Elementary School, where I have been working with veteran teachers on my research project. In speaking with Ms. Brunette, she informed me that only about half of the families in Gonzales have Internet access outside of the school grounds. (S. Brunette,

personal communication, April 4, 2012). This poses a problem of accessibility to this beneficial information. Although these organizations have great tools and information that can help families in building their participation in the classroom, they are virtually non-existent with the lack of access.

Teacher Preparation. Being apart of a teacher preparation program myself gave me ample awareness that the education process for teachers does not explicitly display how to engage parents and families into the classroom. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2008) suggests, many pre-service teachers do not encounter much information about the importance of family engagement or framework for how to achieve this until their post-baccalaureate studies or in-service programs such as Beginning Teachers Support & Assessment Program (BTSA). Ms. Hey, a 2nd grade teacher at La Bamba Elementary explains that she had no explicit guidelines and experienced no emphasis placed on making parent contact and forming strong bonds during her B.A. degree. However, when she entered her teaching position, the BTSA Program she was required to take required her to make contact with all of her students' families once every quarter. The BTSA Program provides formative assessment, individualized support and advanced content for newly-credentialed, beginning teachers, and is the preferred pathway to a California Clear Teaching Credential (BTSA, 2008). Although she received this support as an in-service teacher, she expressed that this did not make her feel completely comfortable with abilities to form strong relationships with parents until she graduated the program. Having support like this for in-service teachers would be greatly beneficial. If in-service teachers learned framework that they could bring into their careers, the BTSA program would serve a better purpose of supporting these teachers to try out their techniques they already possess (N. Heys, personal communication, March 18, 2012).

Although Ms. Heys feels to have benefited from her BTSA Program, there are still many in-service teachers who grapple with the idea of how to gain

support from their parents in the classroom. Most teachers' value parental support however receives little guidance and framework on how to obtain this support (Barnyak and McNelly, 2009). This is an on-going problem in the classroom. Without the framework, it is hard for a teacher to initiate the contact with parents. As I mentioned before, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2008) states, "almost every study of school achievement has included at least a rhetorical bow to the importance of positive relationships between families and schools, even though there has been little suggestion of how these alliances might be supported and sustained" (p. 2). This poses threats to teachers being affectively able to convince parents of the importance of their involvement.

Parental Awareness. While it remains true that many parents are not collaboratively working with teachers in their student's educational process, there are many reasons for this. One major reason being that most parents are unaware of how they can help. In talking with many of the parents that I did during my research, many of them have acted solely on moral, not facts. Without clear direction and support, parent involvement will not succeed (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). It is important for teachers to keep in mind that parents have not gone through the same preparation programs as we have, preparing us to work with students and other teachers in collaborative efforts. "Parents need to know exactly how they can help. They lack information on how to become involved." (Finder & Lewis, 2009, p. 108)

Many parents also do not often believe they play a significant role in their child's education. When it comes to literacy, development and areas of language the parent is who carries much influence on the child, prior to their formal education (Hinder, 2010). These facts are important for parents to be aware of. In knowing so, both parents and teachers can work together to take full advantage of opportunities as such to help in the success of the student. As I mentioned before, a lack of relationship between the families and the teacher can ultimately

endanger the quality of education for the children, and mostly in the areas of language and literacy. (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010)

Building awareness amongst our parents is important, but it also is important to build up their esteems. Although parents know that their impact is powerful and are given tools on how to help, this does not mean that they will be eager to do so. The parents must feel they are up to speed on what is going on as well as invited to engage. Sending out parent newsletters, flyers about updates and upcoming events, class goals, student achievements, and home learning techniques can greatly help parents feel they have ample tools to be present in the classroom (Scott-Stein, 1999). Awareness and confidence are very important when it comes to engaging parents into the classroom.

A lot of confidence that we speak about can be directly built through family engagement. Parents being involved in the classroom give the parents a chance to see the teaching of lessons first hand. With a debriefing of curriculum through the avenue in which the children are learning, parents can feel more confident in assisting their children. A mother of an 8th grade girl I interviewed put it this way:

The benefit that is not stated often is that you get to see what the important things in the class are and incorporate them into your life. For example, if your child has an in class project to write a something on 'cats' and you hear about it while you are working in the class, you can read them a book about cats at bedtime. In theory, they will feel more confident and engaged in their project.

This assistance with the parents esteem building will come naturally through their presence in the classroom.

Partnership Builds Bonds. It is important for parents to be involved in a healthy collaboration with their children's teachers to promote success educationally. It has been discussed how to bring these parents into the classroom and how to

make them the most comfortable. However, it is important to understand how influential the parents' presence in the classroom is to children's social skills. "A parent's closeness with a teacher allows the child to develop better communication skills because when they feel more comfortable with their teacher, they also feel more at ease in the school environment and friendly with their peers" (Baker, 2006, p. 331). Many children struggle through elementary school with becoming socially stable, so a parents presence, in a healthy collaborative way, can help to assist children through this process. Parents and teacher's conversing together can set a great example for the students. This modeled relationship is one they can transfer over to their relationships with other students (Murray & Greenberg, 2000).

When parents form close bonds with teachers, the next natural step is that children will form this same bond with their teachers. This is hugely as beneficial as the relationship between parents and teachers. Birch and Ladd (1997) state that children who have close bonds with their teachers typically perform higher in language development because they are more engaged in the classroom. Being comfortable around a teacher, allows a student to perform at his or her highest unique potential knowing that they are supported. Just as these connections are beneficial, not having this bond can also be detrimental to the child's success in the classroom. Children that don't share a connection with a teacher can lose their structure in the classroom and can acquire poor-working habits, which will show in their academic progress (Hamre & Pianta, 2011). Although this is true, many parents need confidence built in order to heavily participate in the classroom, as discussed before. One way to build confidence in parents is to also create culturally relevant curriculum and make parents aware of everyday teachable moments.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum. In an effort to promote family engagement in the classroom, it is important to keep in mind that curriculum is a great avenue to

do this through. It is important to use a child's culture and home life in order to make connections for them through their learning. When culturally relevant curriculum is presented, not only can children better relate to and retain the lessons, but parents can better help with this learning process using the knowledge they possess on the topic. As we discussed, it is important to make parents feel confident when assisting their children, and culturally relevant curriculum is one approach that can help achieve this. It is important that parents be informed on how to take advantage of culturally rich moments (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). Many things that children live through outside of school can be linked to in school learning, with the parent's assistance.

Through creating culturally relevant curriculum, teachers can reveal a more compassionate and multicultural awareness that can help promote their relatability. It is important to acknowledge the rich social interactions that already take place in the home and base learning around them accordingly. It is also important to empower the parents to contribute intellectually to the development of lessons (Finder & Lewis, 2009). Finder & Lewis recommend assessing the "funds of knowledge" the community already possess to help you build lessons that will engage parents and families. He sites a teacher who recognized that in a Latino community in that many parents had expertise in construction. With this knowledge, he developed a unit on construction that included reading, writing, and speaking about construction with the assistance of the community experts, the children's parents. The Finder and Lewis study also gives suggestions that came straight from parents. Some of the parent's suggestions were to incorporate cooking ethnic foods, learning about multicultural heritages, and bringing in role models from the community. This will not only help the parents feel as if they have more to contribute, but at the same time, help the students make profound connections between their lives and the classroom.

Overall, there are many reasons why parents and families may feel disconnected from the classroom. Some barriers lay at the governmental level and others are a result of simple past experiences and current social positions. In all, as educators, it is our responsibility to find out how to break down some of these barriers, in an attempt to give students the most valuable and equitable educational experience. In collaboration with our parents, we can help turn them into the advocates for their student's learning that they have always been capable of being. Keeping in mind that every individual has an internal source of knowledge that can be tapped into is a key to beginning a collaborative teaching experience for our students. It is important to exhaust all of our options when it comes to equitably schooling our children, and most of these options lie in the students' home life.

Methods & Procedures

This information was gathered through a literature review as well as interviews done with in-service teachers, parents, and previous educators who still remain in the education field. Through my research, I have concluded that both parties have past experiences that play roles in the inhibition of forming successful teacher-family relationships. Continuing to understand how these experiences play roles is important for taking steps towards building and promoting the formation of collaborative relationships. Throughout this project, I was also able to gather suggestions on how to remedy some of these inhibitions, and have included them here as well as in a brochure made available to the public.

For my literature review, I used CSUMB Library Resources such as JSOTR, Ebsco, and Psych Journals, along with the Internet. I thought it was important to include Internet sources because the Internet is so widely accessible to day, and this is where some of our teacher's and families obtain information. Some of the information I found on the web included websites that provide

suggestions on how teachers can better reach families, as well as how parents can be heard in the classroom. I felt this was important because some people in the field may already be taking advantage of this information. For information to be gained from my interview questions, I spoke with teachers and parents who are linked to schools locally in Monterey County. This helps my study have a more regionally appropriate aspect, which is what I was reaching to achieve.

For my interview aspect, I interviewed professionals in the field to obtain some first hand accounts of their experiences (See Appendix A & B). I was able to interview 5 in-service teachers and 1 principal for this part of my project. Along with seeking information from educators, I sought out to gain information from parents of students as well (See Appendix C). After all, parents are an integral part to the formation of parent-teacher relationships. Many times we focus on what issues lie in the education system through the lenses of the teachers, so I wanted to gain the perspective of the parents. For this part of my project, I was able to interview 5 parents of various school-aged children. A large reason behind conducting the interviews was to also help me develop some suggestions on how to promote the formation of these relationships. Although the bulk of my research focuses on why these formations are not happening, I wanted to include how to form them as well.

For a “next step” aspect, I developed a brochure of tips for both parents and teachers. These tips are designed to help these individuals become more aware of the importance of the formation of these relationships. Instead of laying out what aspects inhibit the formation of these relationships, I instead I have provided suggestions that directly relate to the aspects and help to break down the barriers. A few teachers I have worked with through out my project have agreed to make these brochures available to their students parents. The hosting school I conducted my teacher interviews at has also agreed to make these brochures available to their teachers. I had the brochures printed and made them

available for community members attending the CSUMB Spring 2012 Capstone Festival on May 17, 2012. (See Parent – Teacher Tip Brochure)

Results and Discussion

It is apparent that there are many factors that are at play during the formation of parent teacher relationships. Unfortunately, many of these factors assist in inhibiting the formation rather than promoting it. Through my literature review as well as first hand interviews I have gathered this information:

What does research say about the social difference and systematic factors that inhibit a close partnership between elementary school teachers and families?

a. What are the causes that create barriers between elementary school teachers and families?

Research explicitly lays out many factors that contribute to the inhibition of forming these relationships. Research suggests that law and legislation play a part in this inhibition. Without legal mandate requiring family engagement, it is difficult to ensure that teacher's will make this aspect of their job a priority. Also, without law and legislation being developed, most of the valuable information on parent-teacher collaboration remains as an Internet resource. This can pose a problem in low-income areas, where parent-teacher relationships are most absent due to the lack of Internet access. (Parental Information and Resource Center [PIRC], 2010)

Another deterrence to the formation of parent teacher relationships is the lack of preparation teachers receive on how to build these relationships. Although pre-service teachers are told that engaging their families into the classroom is important, there is a lack of factual information presented as well as framework provided. Many teachers express their want for parent and family involvement in their classrooms; however, do not feel adequately prepared to tackle this issue

head on. Many teachers take attempts at building significant relationships, however, spend years of trying before developing a method that really works. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2008)

My research also yielded that another barrier that inhibits the formation of these relationships is parental awareness. Many parents are unaware of the intense impact they can have on their student's success in the classroom. On top of them being unaware, some parents, even after being made aware, do not believe that they have much to contribute. Although they may know that their contribution is important, they may not feel adequate enough to contribute. This leads to research discussing that parents need to be made feel confident enough to contribute to their child's classroom and education. (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009) (Finder & Lewis, 2009)

Research suggests that with discussing how important the parent's presence is in the classroom, the families and parents should also be represented in the classroom through culturally relevant curriculum. Parents' visible presence in the classroom helps to build a social structure for students on how to both interact and bond with their teacher, as well as their peers. Parents and teachers can provide students with a proper framework of how to collaboratively work that they can translate into working with their peers. Providing culturally relevant curriculum is one affective way to include parents in the collaboration process. This type of curriculum will also assist the student in making connections between their real life and schoolwork, which will make the lessons richer for them. (Murray & Greenberg, 2000) (Finder & Lewis, 2009)

This knowledge is what prompted me to want to build my Parent-Teacher Tip Brochure. It is important that these suggestions and recommendation be made tangible and easily accessible. All schools should work together with their teacher's to support their quest in developing parent-teacher collaborations.

How does the system (teacher preparation programs and state or federal standards) affect teachers' process in forming relationships with students' families?

In speaking with 2 of the teachers I did during my research process gave light to the lack of framework and preparation given to some of the teachers. 4 out of the 5 teachers I spoke with stated that they could not remember any specific information being given to them on how to build significant relationships with their student's families. Although they were made aware of some multicultural issues to keep in mind, many of them were not given framework of how to work around these issues. One 2nd grade teacher of 2 years stated:

I knew I would face language barrier issues but when I actually faced them, I seemed to not be able to recall how to get around them. It is talked about a lot, but hardly suggestions, other than having a translator, were not given to me. (2nd grade teacher, personal communication, March 14, 2012)

Although this is true, suggestions such as this, and becoming bilingual, are not given in depth. This teacher told me she began to develop bilingual newsletters to help those parents feel more involved, because she felt the translator-present face to face conversation was very limiting and did not all inclusively involve the parents.

Although this may be true about the pre-service education of teacher's the in-service training given by the BTSA, Beginning Teacher's Support Assessment, and program has proved to be helpful. A 2nd grade teacher in her first year shed light on some requirement she had to meet through her program:

I was required to make contact with all of my students' parents 4 times a year. Two of these times could be done through the parent teacher conference that the whole school participates in, so I used the other two times to hold midterm meetings with my parents. This gave me a chance to touch base with the parent's about any problems that were occurring

before the conference. This also helped us curve some of the learning problems or behavior issues before report cards were due. (2nd grade teacher, personal communication, March 18, 2012)

I think modeling things as such in more depth during the pre-service education of teachers can help them develop innovative approaches to forming these relationships before there are actually in the field. Although this teacher was able to develop this technique fairly early in her career, some teachers are not so lucky, as this requirement she was given was specific to her BTSA mentor, not the program itself.

Do past social and/or educational experiences of the parents and teachers play roles in how, or even whether or not, these relationships are formed?

Through interviews I conducted, I saw an alarming rate of how many parents and teachers held biases towards each other based on their past experiences. These experiences include those with other people as well as with the current parent or teacher. 4 of my parents and 1 teacher exposed how their past experiences shaped the way they viewed the parent teacher relationship as well.

How do the social differences of families and teachers past schooling affect the formation of their relationship?

Most of the social differences lied on the side of the parents. Many gave accounts of whether or not their parents participated in their schooling and how that shaped what type of interaction they engaged in with their student's teachers. One emerging theme I received from my interviews were that the parents who did not see their parents active in their classroom, were the ones who made it a mission to be involved in their students educational process, whether it be in the classroom or in extra curricular school vents. One parent of a 1st grade little girl stated:

I was always the girl at school whose parents were never present. You know, when some parent's came to school, kids would shout, "so-and-so, your moms here!" because everyone had become familiar with their parents. However, when I would come to Back to School Night, kids would instead ask me, "Who are they?" This was mainly because my parents were both in active duty. Because of this, nannies or other lower ranking soldiers of my parents did most of the drop offs and pick-ups. This urged me to be extremely active in my daughter's classroom. I never wanted her to have those same feelings of detachment that I grew up with. I volunteer regularly twice a week in my daughter's classroom and am a chaperone on every field trip. (Parent 4, personal communication, April 16, 2012)

Although it is easy to generalize this about active parents, there are still other aspects that prevent parents from being as engaged, as they would like to be because of social aspects. One mother of a 4th grade student stated:

My parents were never heavily involved in my education, and this was mostly because my father was not in the picture and so my mom worked full time and over time as a single mother. Unfortunately, I have fallen into the same circumstances with my children so I am not able to commit much time to my daughter's classroom as well. I feel like I turned out ok and didn't struggle much in school so I am not too concerned with my involvement in my daughter's classroom. (Parent 5, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

This same idea of time constraint weighs heavy on the minds of some teachers as well. Some teachers also experienced growing up with parents who did not have time to contribute, so they don't make it a huge aspect of their classrooms.

A 1st grade teacher of 3 years stated:

My parents both worked full-time when I was in grade school, so I the only model I remember from my K-12 schooling was Back To School nights and parent-teacher conferences... I do not require any regular volunteer service of my student's parents because I understand parents have other

obligations such as work and/or younger children to look after. (1st grade teacher, personal communication, May 5, 2012)

One other interesting theme I ran into during my research was the mention of college. Two mothers of 8th grade girls both mentioned college being a factor that encouraged their involvement in their student's classrooms. One mother stated:

My daughter receiving a 4-year college degree is my ultimate goal. I like to be involved in her education process to make sure this is being fostered in her K-12 education. I like to be sure that she is learning the skills she will need to be successful in college. (Parent 1, personal communication, March 16, 2012)

The other stated:

I like to make sure that college options stay open for my child. I keep in close contact with my child's teachers to make sure she is meeting all the requirements she will need to make it to college. Although the work she is doing now will not translate on her college applications, I want to make sure she has a strong foundation in the areas that will matter for college later on. (Parent 2, personal communication, March 16, 2012)

Both of these parents have obtained M.A. degrees themselves.

These were important findings to me. Knowing this information can help us to stray away from building assumptions about our parents and why they do not spend time in the classroom. This also shows how teachers build their ideas around whether or not to require support of parents.

What hesitations do teachers have and which biases do families bring to their relationships?

Hesitations are also present when building relationships between parents and teachers. Many parents have had bad experiences in the past and some teachers may experience insecurities about their position as the "professional". In

one interview with the father of an 8th grade boy, he touched on some of the hesitations he possesses because of his education as a child.

I was always the “problem child” in my classes growing up. That is how the teacher’s saw me. They’ve been telling me for a few years now that my kid has “behavior problems” as well yet I have yet to meet a teacher who attempted to do something about it. I don’t feel I need to go meet with them to hear it any longer. I know they would prefer my kid to just not be in their class, because I know when I used to miss school, my teacher’s were relieved. (Parent 3, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

These types of assumptions that parents carry from grade to grade can greatly hinder a “caring” teachers ability to reach a parent. Many assumptions are made about teachers and how they will interact with parents because of damaging actions previous teachers have practiced. The mother of a 4th grade girl stated:

Each teacher has their own style but one thing I feel I’ve learned is that when I have requested something out of the norm it has posed problems as if I was requesting special treatment. When in actuality every parent should be requesting progress reports at least twice a month just so they can see where their child is on the learning curve and help them rather than wait for report card time and it be too late. (Parent 5, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

This was pretty startling to me. In much of my research, I came across suggestions of better open door policies being established, however, I found it hard to believe that teachers really practiced “bad” open door policies. This interview made that research a little more real for me. This is definitely one aspect that all teachers should examine carefully. Even if they feel that they have adequately welcomed parents’ suggestions, some of their actions may come across differently and this can be very damaging.

One mother stated how she felt she was not engaged because of her daughter’s difficulty in the classroom. She has ADHD and so she learns very

differently than the other students in her class and sometimes requires extra attention. This is how she stated her assumptions:

I do not like the impersonal relationships I have (or don't have) with my child's teachers through e-mail... I have to think that the ones that are responded to are probably the parents of the "good students". Human nature would be that teachers prefer to not have to struggle to bring the challenged learners up to speed with the rest of the class, and it affects how they deal with the parents as well. (Parent 2, personal communication, March 16, 2012)

This makes me think back to the parent who had hesitations about how the teachers would talk to him about his child. These to parent's responses bring light to the fact that parents of "problem children" can be especially difficult to handle from a teacher's position. This is because of the sensitivities they may hold surrounding their child and their learning or behavioral problems. Teachers should keep in mind that just as many unpleasant experiences these children may have had with teachers, their parents may have had the same.

Recommendations

After conducting my research, I decided to produce brochures that host recommendations for teachers and parents alike, to assist them in their formation of collaborative relationships. I decided to choose the route of the brochure because a part of my research that resonated with me most is the lack of tangible information in the middle of a technologically booming society. I have included my brochure layouts here for resource purposes. Please see Parent – Teacher Tip Brochure.

Problems & Limitations

While exploring what factors inhibit the formation of partnerships between families and teachers, it is difficult to stay fully focused on that one path. I feel like I may have been able to produce a more cohesive study if I had included all of

the aspects involved in the formation of relationships into my research questions. I feel like my research questions were a bit chunky and not as specific as I would have liked them to be. It was a little difficult to place the information I obtained in my interviews under the appropriate question. Also, the way my questions were worded made it difficult to answer them completely because after doing all of my research, it was hard for me to decide which information I wanted to include as the answer. If I could conduct this research again, I would create shorter, briefer questions, which would have more specific answers.

Another problem I ran into was time. My original idea of creating a brochure that would be produced mid-project that would allow me to conduct a post-survey on it's effectiveness, was unrealistic for the time span of the semester. I originally wanted to conduct my interviews and research, create a brochure that would create some type of change in the way parents and teacher's interact with each other, and then do a post-survey on the original interviewees so assess it's effectiveness. Instead, I chose to use my brochure as a next step, recommendation type tool.

Also, along with any type of research, sample size is very important. Due to the fact that I conducted interviews, I did not have the time to use a very large sample size. This makes it hard for me to make generalizations of the information I obtained. A survey style assessment may have been easier in the aspect of gaining a larger study population. However, conducting a survey style assessment would, again, have required me to refocus my research questions and rework their wording.

Conclusion

It is clear that collaborative partnerships between parents and teachers are lacking in our education settings. This makes understanding how social differences and systematic factors inhibit the formation of partnerships between

elementary schools and families, all the more important. In order to rectify any inequalities or injustices in our education system, we must identify which factors are assisting the formation of them. As discussed here, there are many inhibiting factors assisting the lack of collaborations that are seen to lie at legislative, preparation, social, and cultural levels. Making resources more tangible can help to eliminate the lack of awareness parents have when it comes to collaboration. Preparing our teachers more adequately in the field of fostering these partnerships will help promote collaboration in classrooms. Understanding and identifying inhibiting factors will help us move forward as a system and help us to achieve our goal of success for every student. I am eager to continue learning about how to better form collaborative partnerships with parents through my own work, and with the assistance of other teachers.

As a future educator, forming partnerships with my student's families is one of the most important aspects to me. I have always known that a parent's active presence in their child's educational process is beneficial to them and the other students; however, this research project has greatly broadened my knowledge base. I learned factual information about the benefits of parental involvement as well as gained perspective of many parents who have been dealing with teachers on the other side of the spectrum, for some time now. The interviews I conducted provided me with many reasons for family disengagement that I had not previously been aware of. I feel like my research project served its purpose mainly because I learned a lot as a future educator. If my research project can do the same for others, it will remain a success.

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7) What, if any, systematic factors do you feel inhibit you from forming partnerships with your families? (Teacher preparation, etc)

8) Overall, how do you feel about the concept of a constant partnership with families to benefit the students?

9) Do you feel there are consequences to not engaging families into the schooling of the children through parent-teacher partnerships? If yes, how so and what are they?

6) What systematic factors do you see playing roles in inhibiting the formation of teacher-family partnerships?

7) Do you believe there are consequences to not having a teacher-family partnership present in the classroom? If yes, how so and what are they?

6) What social differences (I.E. language barriers, educational background, past experiences) do you see playing roles during the formation of partnerships between yourself and your child's teachers?

7) What suggestions do you offer teachers & schools on their quest to build more consistent relationships with parents?