



Involving Parents in Student Achievement

Introduction

In the Pacific Regional Education Laboratory (REL) research project, our primary focus was to provide professional development for early literacy teachers. However, as we worked with teachers, we realized that a child's learning is influenced a great deal by others in their life and that their first teachers are their parents. As a result, we brought parents into the picture by inviting them to the school, so they could learn from their child's teacher and, at the same time, share relevant information about their child.

Desired Outcomes

1. To make parents aware of their students' early literacy strengths and needs, so they can provide assistance to their children at home.
2. To build close relationships between parents and teachers.

Participants Roles

- Principal: The principal should be the facilitator of the meeting and may contribute to the discussion and sharing.
- Teacher: Presents a story on the child's performance at school and listens and takes notes on the discussion. Prepares and presents an activity parents can use to help their child at home.
- Parents: Share stories about their child and ask questions for clarification and understanding.

Setting Up the Experience

- The principal schedules a meeting time that is convenient both for parent(s) and teacher.
 - A schedule should be prepared and shared with the parents before the meeting.
 - The principal should always be mindful of the teachers' time and energy level, and the meeting should take place after instructional hours.
 - Teachers and principal should make refreshments available to parents. Food is an important aspect of Pacific cultures and is a small way of acknowledging the contributions of others. With this kind of short meeting, pastries and soft drinks will do.
 - Select a meeting place that is comfortable for all parties and ensures privacy. This is important because you are discussing student assessment information and class work, which should be treated as confidential.

- The teacher prepares in advance data/information on each individual child's performance/work to share with the parents. The teacher should also be prepared to share specific activities that a parent can do at home with the child to improve the child's performance on the discussed skill.
 - It should also be emphasized that the teacher not meet with more than three parents per day so they can focus their energy on a small number of children at a time.
 - The meeting should take 20 to 30 minutes at the most, per parent.

Information Exchange and Sharing Session

- 1) Principal welcomes everyone and facilitates introductions. Next, he makes a brief remark about the purpose of the meeting. After explaining the purpose, he opens the floor for sharing.

- 2) Teacher shares specific instructional experience with the child. At this time the teacher provides examples of child's work and introduces specific activities the parent can do at home to assist the child in learning literacy skills.

P-CHILD

- 3) Parents listen and ask questions for clarification and understanding.
- 4) Parents decide if they feel comfortable and confident enough to assist their child with suggested activities. (It should be noted here that there are basic literacy skills taught at the lower grade levels [e.g., alphabet sounds] that parents could actually assist their child at home with.)
- 5) Parents share a story about their children and how they learn.
- 6) Teachers listen and ask questions for clarification and understanding.
- 7) Before the end of the meeting, schedule a follow-up meeting 2 weeks later. During the follow-up meeting, parents and teachers will review student's performance over the past 2 weeks to see if they have made a difference in student learning.

Conclusions

Human conversations are powerful mechanisms to bring about positive change and should not be overlooked but encouraged, especially in the learning processes of the children. It should take place among students, between students and teachers, between students and parents, and between teachers and parents.

Educators in small Pacific islands should not assume that parents are not educated and therefore are not ready to help their children learn. In PREL's early literacy initiative, we found that parents are open and willing to do their part in helping their children grow both physically and academically. As the parents came to know their children's needs, they began helping their children after school as agreed upon. Likewise, as teachers learned new information about the children from the parents, they incorporated this learning into their instructional delivery. For example, one parent said that the child usually wants to spend a lot of time by himself playing, and, when spoken to, he would not respond, but just keep on playing. From this information, the teacher incorporated games into her lesson, and even spent more time talking with the students. So, after a 2-week period, the teacher said the student out-performed many of the students who were usually doing better.

In short, a teacher can affect student learning but when teachers and parents work together as a team, they can provide learning experiences that better meet the needs of their children. Additionally, when children see that their parents are involved in their learning, it communicates that learning is essential and students' motivation and confidence as learners increase as a result.

