

Parental involvement in school benefits students and develops teacher-parent relationships

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Abstract

Parental involvement (PI) in student education is highly beneficial for student-parent and teacher-parent relationships. Based on literature review, the present study explores how PI in school-based activities enhances the learning journey of students and is a medium for teachers and parents to forge effective school-home partnerships. This review explores a varied scope of literature to determine why creating professional teacher-student and school-home partnerships is an especially important contemporary educational issue within New Zealand (NZ) today and how teachers need to take responsibility for and be proactive about PI in school-based activities.

Keywords: *parental involvement, school-based, student benefits, teacher-parent relationships*



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Introduction

Parental involvement (PI) in the education of children has multi-dimensional benefits (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Dyk, Hancock & Jones, 2012; Goldberg & Tan, 2009; Graham-Clay, 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Witte, 2010). PI is not only extensively beneficial to the child, but a crucial tool in developing parent-teacher relationships. To avoid repetition, the present article will refer to students as children and as learners, the meaning behind these terms being that they receive schooling in an educational institution. This article uses the term PI to mean active commitment from parents in the academic lives and developmental areas of their children within a school context (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Dyk et al., 2012).

The review will begin by explaining what school PI consists of and drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979, as cited in Tan & Goldberg, 2009) ecological systems theory to contextualise PI in the child's life. Next, literature will be reviewed to briefly describe how PI benefits the academic, leadership skill and socioemotional development of students. The review will then explore research data on how school-based activities are a developing space for NZ schools to build positive relationships with parents, and the responsibilities teachers have to secure genuine school-home partnerships within a changing demographic.

What does school PI consist of?

Consistent with Borgonovi and Montt's (2012) cross-national analysis of PI in student's life, Hornby & Lafaele (2011) divide PI into two main categories: home-based and school-based. Both are widespread in NZ (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012); indeed NZ's school system is one of the most inclusive in the world (Hornby & Witte, 2012). Home-based PI involves parents taking an interest in their child's education at home, such as through discussion, reading, and play (American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP), 2012). However, the focus of this review is on school-based PI. According to Borgonovi and Montt (2012) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011), school-based PI involves communication between parents, teachers and the school. They agree examples include parent-teacher meetings and parents volunteering within school events and extra-curricular activities (ECA).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model describes how individuals are nested in contextual layers, and how these layers influence and impact upon their development and lifestyle. Within this theory, the microsystem is the context for the child's home life and the mesosystem for school-based PI as here there are linkages between the student's home and school environments (Goldberg & Tan, 2009). Therefore, it is within the mesosystem where teachers have the opportunity to forge effective partnerships between school and home (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012).

How does school PI benefit students?

Academic - Throughout literature reviewed there is a correlation between PI and increased academic performance levels in students. Indeed, children whose parents are actively involved in school are likelier to gain higher grades, especially in reading, and have increased levels of engagement and motivation in school (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Leadership Skill - In Volume 11 of the Winter Journal of Leadership Education, Dyk et al. (2012) highlight adolescents' perceive their leadership skills to be positively influenced by PI in ECA. Implications of this include students feeling supported by the mentoring adult-youth partnership and thus motivated to actively engage in leadership roles themselves (Dyk et al., 2012).

Socio-emotional - School-based activities are also an opportunity for students to develop socioemotional skills and prosocial interactions with adults through play (Dyk et al., 2012; Frederick & Eccles as cited in AAP, 2012). Research has evidenced that from early childhood onwards play helps to develop social, emotional and cognitive skills as well as being an opportunity for children to explore and develop resilience, co-operation and negotiation (AAP, 2012; Dyk et al., 2012). PI in school-based play also creates mentoring, protective and motivational parent-student relationships (AAP, 2012; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Dyk et al., 2012). Furthermore, research from Hong Kong states how ECA involvement increases self-esteem levels in children (Euji, 2011), and both Dyk et al. (2012) as well as Borgonovi and Montt (2012) agree that PI in the mesosystem is a clear example of social learning theory as it involves direct social interactions between parents, students and the school.

School-home partnerships

As well as school-based PI being highly beneficial to students and a recognised medium for parent-student mentoring relationships, research has also highlighted how PI in the student's mesosystem is integral to teacher-parent relationships (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Dyk et al., 2012; Graham-Clay, 2005; Tan & Goldberg, 2009). Indeed, in 2005 Graham-Clay found that PI in school-based activities is fundamental to building a sense of community and collaboration between home and school. Graham-Clay's research was echoed six years later by Hornby and Lafaele in 2011 in a portrayal of how PI in school-based activities is an opportunity to better teacher-parent relationships and improve school climate. Again this research was paralleled three years ago when Borgonovi and Montt (2012) published extensive data about how professional teacher-parent relationships enhances student performance as well as school-based collaboration. Graham-Clay (2005) also noted that teachers who encourage positive communication with parents will find an increased level of trust within the wider community; a finding later paralleled by Carrington and McArthur's (2010) emphasis on building supporting positive relationships between schools and communities.

Implications of Changing Demographic

PI in school-based activities is a particularly contemporary educational issue in NZ because of the changing demographic. With 17% of primary school children not being born in NZ (Howard, 2015), teachers need to be respectful and inclusive of

all cultures and families in the school community (Carrington & MacArthur, 2010; Fraser & McGee, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Implications of NZ's changing demographic include barriers between migrant families and PI in their child's mesosystem. For example, migrant families new to the NZ education system are exposed to contrasting stimuli and schooling experiences (Lustig & Koester, 1996), and many suffer from a plethora of cultural and linguistic difficulties (Howard, 2015). These every day struggles generate feelings of culture shock and insecurity (Lustig & Koester, 1996). Indeed, the literature reviewed found that some migrant parents feel insecure about their ability to become involved in school-based activities because of these struggles, as well as having a lack of confidence in their own academic skills and negative experiences from their own schooling experiences (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lustig & Koester, 1996).

NZ Teacher Responsibilities

NZ's past is littered with reproductions of social inequalities in schools through acts of symbolic violence such as ignoring indigenous Māori values to reaffirm colonising Pākehā attitudes and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1977; Manning, 2015; Quinlivan, 2015). Therefore NZ teachers need to be aware of this history and of current national demographic changes in order to not leave any student's culture outside of the classroom door like has happened in the past (Penetito, 2010). Thus it is the teacher's responsibility to create a culture of belonging within the student's mesosystem by accepting and celebrating *all* students and *all* parents (Fraser & McGee, 2008) so as to encourage and promote PI.

Research has found school-based activities to be structured and supervised by teachers (AAP, 2012; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012). Therefore it is the responsibility of educators to take action (Hornby & Witte, 2010), and to encourage parents to be actively involved for the benefit of parent-student relationships and the formation of teacher-parent relationships. Teachers need to increase parent engagement and ensure there is encouragement and reciprocal communication so parents feel involved and confident to help in their child's learning journey (Graham-Clay, 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Strategies could include teachers diversifying ECA, scheduling collaborative learner-progress conferences, and making use of available technology to engage parents in the learning process (Graham-Clay, 2005). Respecting parents as educational resources, for example inviting them to share skills and experiences with students in schools, is another practical way for teachers to encourage PI and demonstrate the value of *all* families in the school community (Macfarlane, 2004).

Conclusion

PI is evidently a significant and highly beneficial practice within educational institutions. The literature reviewed has clearly conveyed how PI in school-based activities is situated within the mesosystem as there are linkages between the student's school and home environments. This review has drawn upon a range of sources to describe the benefits of school-based PI and was highlighted how PI in school-based activities is beneficial to the development of teacher-student relationships and collaborative school-home partnerships. The review also explored how

teachers are responsible for encouraging and promoting PI, a responsibility crucial in the navigation of NZ's changing national and school demographic.

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