Examining Teacher's Comfort Level of Parental Involvement

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Abstract

The connection between home and school is of utmost importance. Therefore, an important concern for those educating teachers is to help teachers recognize the need for and importance of establishing parental involvement and to help them create avenues in which communication can occur. Knowing that parental involvement is important and putting that knowledge into practice is often difficult for teachers. This study uncovered the present practices and attitudes of 131 urban teachers about parental involvement by asking them to complete an online survey. It was found that the teachers' current practice and their schools' policy did not align with their definitional understanding of parental involvement. In practice, parents were included in school sponsored back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, chaperoning trips, fund raising activities, and implementing school and classroom agendas. There were few opportunities to include parents in policy making, curriculum decisions, or activities to determine and use home literacy events in the classroom.

The importance of creating a connection between home and school cannot be underestimated. Therefore, an important concern for those educating teachers is to help teachers recognize the need for and importance of establishing parental involvement and to help them create avenues in which communication can occur.

This study uncovers the present practices of teachers when establishing a connection between home and school. It looks at ways in which schools and teachers involve parents by asking elementary school teachers to complete a survey designed to determine their schools' policies and practice. The purpose of the research is to determine levels of comfort of elementary school teachers when involving parents in their classrooms with a focus on ways in which they create partnerships with parents around literacy development.

Need for Parent-School Connections

Schools and families must work together to ensure student academic success. The need for home-school partnerships cannot be underestimated. In fact, the importance of parental involvement has been the focus of considerable research for quite some time (for example, Beck, 2002; Epstein, 1988; Shockley et al., 1995). In reviewing the literature on parental involvement, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that students with involved parents were more likely to earn higher grades, enroll in higher level programs, be promoted, attend school regularly, have better social skills, and graduate. "When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make greater gains," (p. 8). They also concluded that to be effective the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement, helping parents develop specific knowledge and skills, inform parents what their children are learning, and how to help their children at home.

In addition, schools can better engage families by working actively to invite them into a partnership (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1999), build programs and initiatives that focus on building trust and respect (Beck, 2002), and develop mutual understanding in each others interests (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Parents need to know they are welcome to be a part of the school community and that their participation is valued. "Lack of interest is a natural response when parents do not feel valued," (Endrizzi, 2008, p. 9). Efforts for parental involvement are most successful when the school staff assumes that all parents want the best for their children (Shartrand et al., 1997). It is essential for teachers and school staff to have a positive attitude toward family-school relationships (Graue, 2005).

There is considerable consensus that schools should incorporate home literacy practices into the curriculum of the classroom and into school programs (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Shartrand et al., 1997). Doing so recognizes the multifaceted nature of literacy and acknowledges existing family literacy practices (Dail & Payne, 2010). Auerbach (1995) asserted that programs should build on the resources that families possess and encourage parents to be collaborators in their children's literacy development. Wherry (2009) citing a 2001 study by the U.S. Department of Education stated that when teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents of low achieving students, their reading tests grew at a rate 50% higher than in students where teachers reported low outreach to parents. Henderson and Mapp (2002) also found teacher outreach to parents are related to strong and consistent gains in student performance in reading and mathematics. " While sporadic parenting activities that encourage literacy interactions among parents and children are valuable, intensive and lasting literacy services are needed to help parents and children achieve the readiness skills desired for school success, " (Swick, 2009, p. 404).

However, in their report Henderson and Mapp (2002) cited a number of studies that concluded that some forms of parental involvement such as volunteering, attendance at school events, and parents being in communication with the school had little effect on student achievement. This traditional view of parental involvement activities is one where parents give something to the school, communication is unidirectional, and a narrow range of ways parents can participate Shartrand et al., 1997). In her study of preservice teachers, Graue (2005) asserted, "Despite the strong value placed on parental involvement in education, this group of preservice teachers indicated that relationships with families are built on a foundation of unequal partnership," (p. 182). Schools and teachers need to examine ways in which they reach out to families and must new learn new ways to promote parental involvement.

Teachers and Parental Involvement

"School efforts to promote family involvement in children's education will succeed
only if teachers are adequately prepared to support these efforts," (Shartrand et al., 1997, p.1). Schools also need a philosophy and a positive belief that parental involvement is important and that a partnership requires the sharing of power (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Nelson & Guerra, 2010). The National Task Force on School Readiness (1991) found that inadequate time and training of school staff as well as an institutional culture that places little value on parental involvement and participation discourage home-school partnerships. In a study of principals, Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues reported principals placing blame on parents, saying they

did not have the understanding or capacity to be involved, and on teachers, reporting that they were ineffective in fostering school-family partnerships. Barriers such as these often limit the type of parental involvement programs and efforts at schools even when school administrators and teachers know home-school partnerships are essential.

Knowing that parental involvement is important and putting that knowledge into practice is often difficult for teachers. A number of studies (see Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997;Lazar et al., 1999; Martin & Hagen-Burke, 2002) suggest that teachers are not prepared to work with families, nor are they prepared to design and implement effective methods to communicate with families of their students. Lazar et al. (1999) surveyed teachers and found that most received information about parental involvement by speaking to colleagues and reading professional literature rather than it being addressed in college courses. Parental involvement training is rarely interactive and depends mostly on lectures, readings and other traditional teaching methods (Shartrand et al., 1997).

Teachers claim to want support from parents and are troubled by low parent involvement but also claim they do not know how to collaborate with them productively (Henderson et al., 2007). Parental involvement is often overlooked in teacher education programs and it then becomes incumbent upon all school staff to identify their beliefs as a means of strengthening the motivation and skills necessary to work with parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). School efforts to involve families in their children's education will only succeed if teachers are prepared to support the efforts (Shartrand et al., 1997). Teachers must be given opportunities in their coursework or during school inservice workshops to critically examine and identify personal characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes that influence their involvement with families (Baum & King, 2006).

Levels of involvement, according to the research, does make a difference when looking at the relationship of home-school partnerships and student achievement. The survey used in this study gave teachers an opportunity to examine their own practice and to consider their schools' policies and practices in involving parents. When the survey was piloted with graduate students, all of whom were practicing urban elementary school teachers, there was an opportunity for them to score their own surveys to discover how their own practice related to their attitudes toward parental involvement.

Research Methods

Participants

Professors teaching graduate students, all current teachers, in the school of education at an urban college were asked to forward, by email, a letter of explanation and link to a survey about the graduate students' comfort level of parental involvement. In addition, the same email with letter and survey link was sent to graduates for whom email addresses were available. Only current teachers of elementary school children were eligible to participate. Of those invited to participate, 131 elementary school teachers completed the survey.

Of the respondents, 93.7% (119) were female. The majority of respondents (47.7% or 62) had been teaching five years or more compared to 15.4% (20) of respondents in their first year of teaching.   Sixty-two respondents (47.7%) had been teaching five years or more compared to 15.4% of respondents in their first year of teaching. Of the respondents, 77.7% (101) described their ethnicity as Caucasian, 7.7% (10) as Hispanic, 5.4%(7) as Black or African American, 3.1% (4) as Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.1% (4) as other and 3.8% (5) preferred not to answer.

Survey Design

The survey is a multiple choice tool designed by the researcher (Jensen et al., 2010) and asked about the school practices and personal practices in establishing parental involvement. The questions were leveled; each first response indicating a policy, attitude or practice involving parents the most (choice a) to the last choice as being the least receptive (choice d) to parental involvement. A total of 25 questions were asked.

The first 20 questions had to do with parental involvement at their school and in their classrooms. The last five questions collected demographic information. Respondents could choose to skip any question on the survey and progress to the next question. The survey was available online using a commercial survey tool.

Analysis

All survey results were aggregated using a tool within the online survey program. The 20 survey questions were grouped. Three of the questions asked about school policy and practice, 4 questions asked about general attitudes of parental involvement, and 13 questions asked teachers to identify their current practice for involving parents.   Following each of the three groups of questions a table is presented illustrating the responses to the questions in that section.

Responses from the two groups on school policy and practice and teachers' attitudes and beliefs were filtered and then cross-tabbed in order to determine if a relationship existed between policy, attitudes, and practice.

Results of School Policy/Practices

Teachers were asked three general questions about their schools' policy and practice relating to parental involvement. Question 1 asked about the level of their schools' requirements for parental involvement, 34.9% (45 respondents) required the teacher to communicate with the parents on a monthly basis and 3.1% (4) were required to communicate with parents monthly when a child was struggling.

Of those respondents, 57.4% (74 respondents) of the schools required the teacher to communicate with parents during school sponsored activities such as parent- teacher conferences and back to school nights and when a child is having difficulty Only 5.4% (7) were required to communicate with parents only around a specific problem.

Question 6 asked about school wide activities designed for parental involvement, 33.6% (44) of the schools planned to engage families in the academic lives of their children and social activities to help make families feel comfortable and connected to the school.   Of the respondents, 24.4% (32) of the schools planned social activities to help the parents feel connected and comfortable with the school.   The majority, 36.6% (48) of the respondents planned back to school night activities a well as parent-teacher conferences during the academic year and 6.1% (8) stated parent-teacher conferences were the only planned activity.

When question 11 asked about the level of parental involvement at the school 14.1% (18) of the schools' parents played an active role in forming policy and curriculum. Of the respondents, 35.9% (46) stated schools' parents were active volunteers by helping the school raise money, 15.6% (20) of the schools' parents helped implement an agenda set by the principal, and 35.2% (45) of the schools' parents were involved by helping with specific projects when asked by the principal.

Figure 1.
*School Policy and Practice*
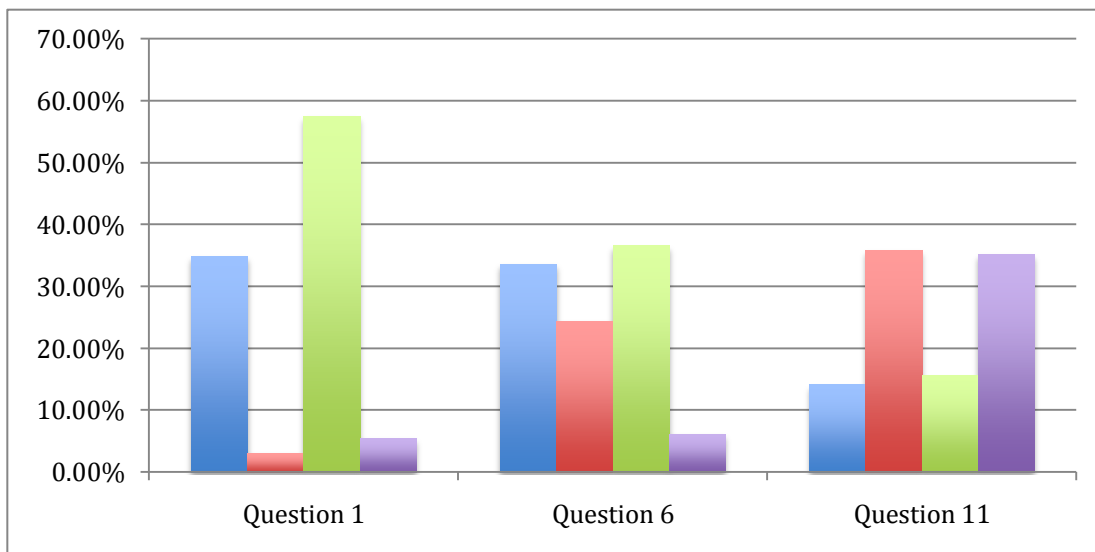
Results of Teacher Attitudes of Parental Involvement

Four general questions were asked which required teachers to identify their perceptions and attitudes about parental involvement. Question 9 asked, "My idea of parental involvement is:" 88.4% (114) teachers chose "a partnership where families and the school work closely together to ensure student success."   Only 1.6% (2) of the respondents said their idea of parental involvement was one where parents and families are involved in planning and getting people out only for school sponsored activities and the remaining respondents (10.9%/14) said their idea of parental involvement was parents volunteering when help is needed and working with their children at home.

In question 13, teachers were asked to select a statement which best represented their attitude about parental involvement in their classrooms. Thirty-six (29%) respondents stated they believed every family has something to contribute so they send home a survey at the beginning of the school year to discover ways in which they can work together. Thirty-two (25.8%) of the respondents believed parents should help in the classroom so often sent letters home requesting help with certain projects Close to 40% (39.5% or 49 respondents) said they asked parents to help with class parties and to chaperone on class trips.. The remaining 6.5% (8) respondents did not want parents in their classroom.

Question 15 asked about home literacy events, 27.2% (34) stated that home literacy events should be included in the life of the classroom. 32.8% (41) of the respondents stated that they were important to know about in order to understand their students' home lives. Twenty respondents (16%) defined home literacy events as reading and writing activities children do at home. Of the respondents, 24.8% (31) stated that literacy events were not present in the homes of their students. Question 16 asked to identify what they believed their responsibility was, 57% (73) of the respondents believed their responsibility was to help parents understand that their home literacy events play an important role in helping their children become successful readers and writers and must build parents' knowledge of how to support their children's literacy development in school and at home. Nearly 40% (39.1% or 50) of the respondents that it was their responsibility to help parents understand that their simple every day interactions with their children establish a foundation for literacy. Less than 5% (6) of the respondents felt that it was their responsibility to instruct parents on ways to implement activities at home (3.1%/4) or believed they had no responsibility to instruct parents (1.6%/2).

Figure 2.
Teacher Practices
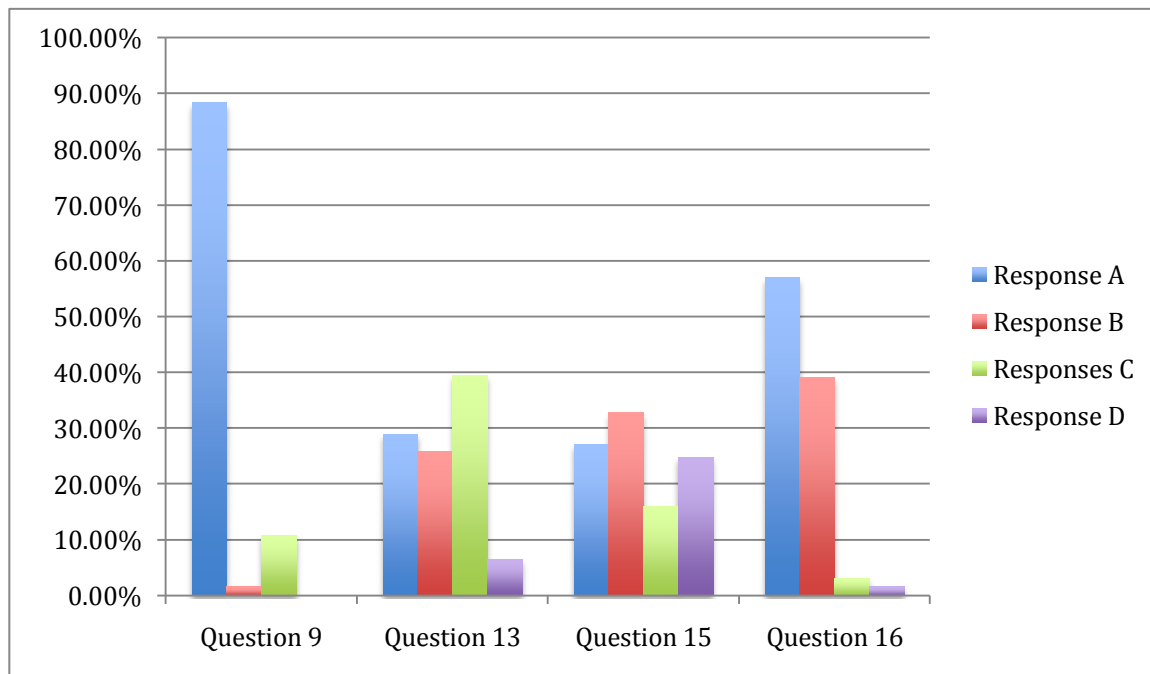
Teacher Practices

Thirteen questions asked teachers to identify their current classroom practices. Four of the questions allowed respondents to select multiple responses to illustrate the variety of ways they attempt to create parent involvement.

Question 2 asked teachers to select the statement which best matched their current practice. Over half of the respondents, 51.9% (67) stated that they alerted parents to the areas of study in school and asked that they made sure their children completed the assignments. Only 10.9% (14) of the respondents sent home a variety of book, website, learning activity or other suggestions for families to do at home and discussed how work in school and home met the standards. In fact, 4.7% (6) respondents stated that the parents of the children in their classroom do not have time or interest to help and would rather not have them involved in what was being taught.

Question 3 asked how parents understood the purpose of their children's work and 41.9% (54) of the teachers said they sent home monthly newsletters explaining the work being done, 14% (18) respondents said parents could look at the bulletin board exhibits outside their classrooms which explained the purpose of the work, 27.1% (35) stated parents would understand if they visited on open school days, and 17.8% (23) said parents could understand the work by observing how well their children performed on graded work.

Question 4 asked respondent to complete the sentence, "When working with parents I…" Most teachers (82.3%/ 107) explained ways parents can monitor their children's work and build their skills, 5.4% (7) of teachers told parents to have their children follow directions on homework and other assignments, 3.1% (4) said they left it up to parents to help with homework in the way they knew best, and 10% (13) teachers said they could not count on parents to help their children with homework.

Question 5 asked teachers what they did after they selected books to read in their classroom. Only 1.6% (2) teachers told the parents ahead of time and gave them the opportunity to read and discuss the book in a parent book club. The parents were told about the book in the monthly newsletter by 20.2% (25) of the teachers. While 46.8% (58) of the teachers stated the parents learned about the book from their children's work related to the book, 32.3% (40) of the teachers said the parents would learn about the book only if their children decided to share their book experiences and discussions at home.

Question 7 asked teachers how they instruct parents and 14.4% (18) of the teachers instructed parents in school-based literacy and sought to learn about and integrate parents' existing knowledge and resources into the school curricula and 21.6% (27) instructed parents in school-based literacy and offered them opportunities for parents to share their knowledge on specific teacher selected topics. Most prevalent, 46.4% (58) of the respondents instructed parents in school-based literacy practices only and 18.4% (23) of the teachers limited the instruction of parents in homework routines.

Question 8 asked how parents learned about classroom activities and 3.1% (4) teachers designed workshops for parents on the topic. Additionally, 36.9% (48) of the teachers sent home weekly or monthly newsletters. However 42.3% (55) of the teachers stated that parents learned about the activities by talking with their children and 18.5% (24) of the teachers said parents would learn about the activities by looking at the work their children brought home.

Question 10 asked about Back to School Night. The majority of respondents, 78.1% (100) stated that parents got a clear idea of what their children would be learning and doing during the year, have opportunity to look at the textbooks they would be using, how the work would meet the standards, expectations, and possible class trips at Back to School Night. The other respondents stated the parent would learn how the room is set up and encourages learning (8.6%/11), told parents what the children would be studying, gave homework expectations and possible trip ideas, and 1.6% (2) teachers told parents topic under study for the year.

Question 12 asked teachers to identify the way in which they linked parents with the topics under study. 11.5% (15) of the respondents worked with parents by sending home learning packets, educational games, or videos linked to what the children were studying in school. Over half of the respondents, 54.2% (71) stated that they made it clear what parents could to at home to promote learning by making suggestions linked to what the children were studying. 27.5% (36) of the teachers simply stated they expected parents to work with their children and 7.6% (10) of the respondents did not expect the parents to be familiar with the topics being studied in school.

When asked about read alouds (question 14), 18.4% (23) of the teachers stated that the parents knew the value of reading aloud to their children and how to interact with their children from workshops the teacher has conducted. An additional 43.2% (54) of respondents stated that the parents knew the value of reading aloud to their children and were, hopefully, following suggestions given at Back to School Night. A small percentage, 4% (5), of the teachers said that parents read aloud to their children from a selection of books sent home and 35.2% (44) of the teachers said that parents should read to their children every night.

Figure 3.
Teacher Practices
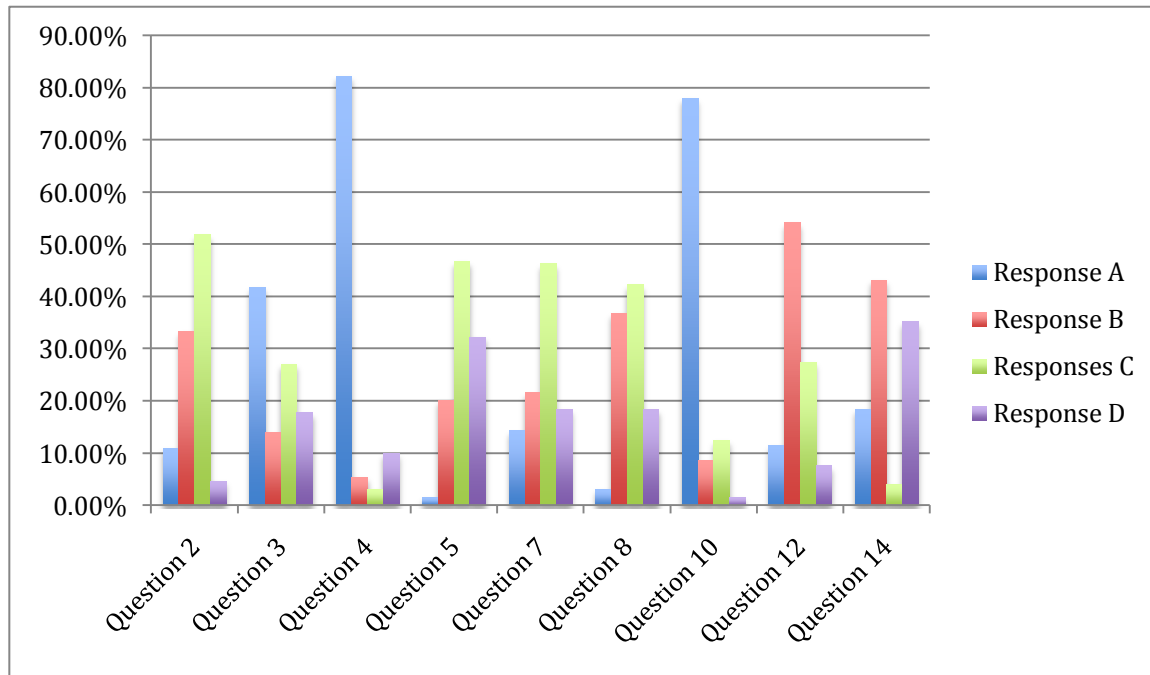
Questions 17, 18, 19, and 20 allowed teachers to give multiple responses. Question 17 asked teachers what in their current practice helped them to understand their students. The most prevalent method, choice C, (87.1%/108) was to speak to parents at parent-teacher conferences about what is read at home. Also, 71% (88) of the teachers asked parents to contact them to discuss any problem their children might be having with reading and writing(choice D, the lowest level response). Only 21% (26) of the respondents said that students brought in portfolios of literacy events that are part of family routines and 27.4% (34) of the teachers had parents and students complete a survey about literacy events in the home.

Question 18 asked teachers about their practice concerning the focus of parent-teacher communication. The focus of communication 89.1% (114) of the time was on the progress of each of the children in the classroom (choice A, the highest level of response) and specifically the progress of each child with academic problems by 56.3% (72) of the teachers, which was the choice B on the survey.

Some of the focus was on class trips, picture day and other general information by 63.3% (81) of the teachers and 71.9% (92) of the teachers said the focus of communication with parents was on misbehaving children.

Question 19 asked teachers to identify when face-to-face meetings with parents occurred. Most teachers, 86.7% (111) stated these occurred at school sponsored Back to School Nights or Parent Teacher Conferences (choice C on the survey). Face-to-face meetings occurred by 71.9% (92) of

the teachers were having problems with a child (choice D) , and 16.4% (21) of the teachers stated thy have face-to-face meeting with parents at workshops they ran for the parents (choice A).

Question 20 asked teachers to identify current practices that occurred regularly in their classrooms. The practice of using family poems, totems, memoirs, stories, etc. characteristic of family cultures was regularly used by 34.5% (29) of the teachers, choice A or the highest level of response. Parents as story tellers or readers could be found in 31% (26) of the classrooms. Parents were invited to send in books characteristic of family culture was found in 42.9% (36) of the classrooms and 63.1% (53) of the teachers regularly used favorite family storybooks (choice D).

Results of Cross-tabbing Attitudes with Practice

The most prevalent responses to the above seven questions were filtered and then cross-tabbed to some of the questions on the survey which asked teachers to identify their current school and classroom practices.
School policy/practice and teacher attitudes/practice

Of the teachers who stated that their school policy required them to communicate monthly with parents of children, in their classroom, 93% stated that parental involvement was a partnership where families and the school work closely together to ensure student success.

Of this group of respondents, 53.3% stated that parents were active volunteers, helping the school raise money and 17.8% stated that parents played an active role in forming school policy and curriculum.

When respondents identified that their the school policy required teachers to communicate with parents at conferences, back to school nights, and when children were having specific problems, 84.9% also stated that a partnership was where families and the school worked closely together. The same respondents stated that the level of parental involvement at the school was where parents helped with specific projects where asked by the principal (46.4%), were active volunteers helping to raise money (23.3%), helped implement an agenda set by the principal (19.2%), and played an active role in forming policy and curriculum (15.1%).

Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs

Of the respondents who stated that parental involvement was a partnership where families and the school work closely together to ensure student success, 55.4% stated it was their responsibility to help parents understand that their home literacy events play an important role in their children becoming successful readers and writers and also felt it was their responsibility to build parents' knowledge of how to support their children's literacy development. Just over 40% (40.2%) felt it was their responsibility to help parents realize their every day interactions at home help establish a literacy foundation.

Of these teachers, 45.5% instructed parents in school-based literacy activities, 23.6% offered that instruction and offered opportunities for parents to share their knowledge on specific topics they

selected, and an additional 15.5% also sought to learn about and integrate parents' existing knowledge and resources into the curricula.

Of these same respondents, 35.2% asked parents to help with class parties and chaperone class trips, 30.6% surveyed parents at the beginning of the year to discover ways in which they could work together, and 28.7 of them sent home letters requesting help with certain projects.

Teacher practice and attitudes

Those teachers who responded that their practice included sending home book, website, learning activity or other suggestions to do at home around books or authors being studied in the classroom and how that work meets standards, 100% (14) also stated that a partnership was one in which families and schools worked closely together to ensure student success.

When the teachers identified their current practice to include a monthly newsletter that discussed areas of literacy study and suggestions of books or websites which may be of further interest, 85.4% (35) of the teachers   identified their idea of parental involvement as a partnership where families and the school worked together to ensure student success and, except for one teacher, identified their idea of parental involvement as being one in which parents should volunteer to help when needed and work with their children at home.

Also 86.4% (57) of the teachers who identified their practice as alerting parents to areas of study and asking them to make sure their children have completed the assignments, identified their idea of parental involvement as a partnership where families and schools worked together to ensure student success. The other teachers, except for one teacher, identified their idea of parental involvement as being one in which parents should volunteer to help when needed and work with their children at home.

Of the teachers who stated that the parents of children in their classroom do not have time or interest to help their children and would rather not have them involved in what they are teaching, 100% stated that parental involvement was a partnership where families and the school worked together to ensure student success.

Of the 51 teachers who identified the monthly newsletter as the method used to develop parental understanding of the work they do in class, 43.1% (22) of the teachers also stated that parents learn about the books read in class from the children's work related to the book, 39.2% (20) stated they used the newsletter to tell parents about the book, and 21.6% (11) of the teachers stated the parents learned about the book only if the children decided to discuss it with them.

These same teachers who said parents develop an understanding of the work they do in class by using a monthly newsletter, said the parents learned about classroom activities in the newsletter by 75% (39) of the respondents and 26.9% (14) of the respondents stated that parents would learn about classroom activities by talking to their children.

School Activities and Classroom Activities

When the teachers identified their school as having a plan to engage families in the children's academic life and social activities to help families feel comfortable and connected to the school, 4.7% (2) teachers said there were workshops designed for parents, 48.8% (21) teachers said they sent home newsletters in order for parents to learn about classroom activities, and 41.9% (18) stated that parents would learn about classroom activities by talking to their children.

Of those teachers who stated that the school has social activities to help make families feel comfortable and connected to the school, 45.2% (14) of the teachers stated that parents would learn about classroom activities by talking with their children and 41.9% (13) of the teachers used newsletters for parents to learn about classroom activities.

When the teacher identified Back to School Night, Parent-Teacher conferences and other whole school sponsored once a year events as the activities for parents, 41.7% (20) teachers stated parents would learn about classroom activities by talking to their children, 29.2% (14) used a newsletter, and 27.1% (13) of the teachers said parents would learn about classroom activities by looking at the work their children brought home from school.

Discussion

School Policy and Practice

The policies and practice of their schools, identified by the teachers, was not conducive to supporting partnerships with parents. As identified by Henderson and Mapp (2002) parental attendance at school wide events and volunteering did not have a positive impact on student achievement. The majority of teachers in this survey do not have to communicate regularly (defined on the survey as monthly) with the parents of children in their classroom. School policy requires them to attend whole school functions for parents such as Back to School Night and Parent-Teacher Conferences. The level of parental involvement at most schools was one of fund raising as well as implementing the agenda set by the principal.

Interestingly, a vast majority of teachers who described the school policy as one in which teachers are required to communicate at school-wide sponsored events, also stated that a partnership was one where families and the school worked closely together. A third of the teachers stated that their school did plan activities for families around academic and social events, a higher level choice than planned Back-to-School nights and Parent-Teacher conferences. However, when put into practice, few teachers discussed how their school planned workshops to enhance parental understanding of curriculum or shared policy making with parents. The vision of how a partnership is defined by the school and the way it is put into practice does not support student academic achievement or a sharing of power (Henderson et al., 2007; Nelson and Guerra, 2010). Efforts of this kind may discourage parental involvement.

Teacher Attitudes

The majority of teachers who participated in this survey understand the nature of home-school partnerships yet their practice is not consistent with their attitude. How their definitional understanding of parental involvement could be put into practice was not evident in their responses to their or their schools' current practice. Even though a vast majority of the teachers said their idea of parental involvement was a partnership which families and the school should work closely together to ensure student success, most said parents should help in the classroom on special project, help with class parties, and chaperone on class trips. Almost a third of the teachers felt that parents have something to contribute and actively try to discover ways in which they can work with parents. From their responses to the survey contributions by parents are limited to chaperoning class trips, following teacher suggestions given at Back-to-School nights or in newsletters, and by monitoring their children's homework.

Of the teachers who believed that parental involvement was a partnership, over half of these same teachers felt it was their responsibility to help parents understand that their home literacy events play an important role in their children becoming successful readers and writers. Almost half of these teachers instructed parents in school-based literacy activities but did not try to discover home literacy events in return.

The views of the teachers for parental involvement are traditional, where communication is unidirectional and where parents give something to the school within a narrow focus (Shartrand et al., 1997).

Teacher Practices

Where teachers outreached to parents by using newsletters, sending home suggestions of books, videos, websites, and other suggestions to support classroom learning as well as informing parents about areas of study and how the children's work met standards, they also indicated that parental involvement was a partnership with the school. Yet even teachers whose practice in working with parents was not at a high level also stated their idea of parental involvement was one of a partnership. What was astonishing was that all the teachers who stated that the parents of children in their classroom do not have time or interest to help their children and would rather not have parents in their classrooms, stated that parental involvement was a partnership between families and school.

Teachers rely on parents to look at the work that they children bring home and have conversations with their children about school in order to discover what work is being done in school, what books are being read, and by looking at the bulletin boards outside of the classroom. The majority of teachers rely on Back to School Night to inform parents about the standards, expectations, and topics for the school year. However, those teachers that did use a weekly or monthly newsletter, relied on the newsletter to be a vehicle for parents to learn about what was going on in the classroom. Most communication initiated by the teacher was on misbehavior.

As suggested by the research, teachers do not know how to effectively put into practice activities or communication systems to create the partnerships they believe will enhance student academic success.

Most teachers instructed parents in school-based literacy practice, educating them on homework routines, asking them to monitor their children's work and to see if their children had completed the assignments. Little time is spent learning about or incorporating family literacy events into the classroom suggesting an uneven power distribution between the parents and teacher (Graue, 2005; Nelson & Guerra, 2010).

There appears to be a disconnect between what teachers believe and what they practice when it comes to parental involvement. Schools are relying on school-wide events to inform and involve parents as partners, activities we are told do not promote student success. Teachers are using Back to School Nights and Parent-Teacher conferences to inform, instruct, and to get to know the parents of the children in their classrooms. They see parents as partners, but not as equal partners, relying on their help with specific projects, as chaperones, and to monitor the work their children are doing.

Implications

As suggested by the research, teachers need the opportunity to reflect on their personal characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes about involving parents. They need support in planning long term, consistent programs to foster partnerships.

Teachers need to know how to make parents feel welcome, valued, and interested. Taking an approach that identifies and builds on parents' strengths and resources allows teachers to build on their wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills (Shartrand et al., 1997). There are a number of resources available to teachers in helping to create a home-classroom connection. The use of newsletters has been an effective method for opening communication and creating an inclusive environment for parental involvement (Jensen, 2007). Teachers have the opportunity to share student work and how that work meets Standards on bulletin boards outside their classrooms. By surveying parents on their interests and how they wish to be involved may help to discover common ground.

Policy statement of schools should include a working philosophy of parental involvement. Administrators must stop placing blame on the inexperience or inability of teachers to work with families and help their schools adopt policies of inclusion. Planned, purposeful in-service and pre-service education is necessary to move teachers from a narrow to a more encompassing view of parental partnerships. Successful family centered programs need to be put into place that value parental input and provide the opportunity for parents, teachers, and administration to work together to ensure student success.

Teacher educators need to make room in their course work for practical experience with parents. When struggling readers come for tutoring in the practicum component of many literacy programs, they often arrive with their parents. Instead of sending parents away while their children are being tutored, have students design and deliver workshops with parents on a rotating

or revolving basis. As part of student teaching experiences, have students work with their cooperating teachers and schools to organize and participate in parental involvement initiatives.

For many, it requires some innovative thinking and creative use of already limited amounts of time in planning for work with parents. Two books that are good starting points for administrators and teachers are *Becoming Teammates* (Endrizzi, 2008) and *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (Henderson et.al., 2007).

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