CHALLENGES TO THE CONCEPT "PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS" IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

It is observed that professionals would meet the needs of individual children if they work closely with the child's parents [58]. The growing of a child is a continuous process which requires a coherent, close partnership between home and school, since the house is the first educational environment, and the first community in which a child lives and grows. Education, habits and trends are taken from these very first, essential experiences. Besides, when children begin their school life, they do not break the relationship to their family but remain under various, significant influences from the family members, including parents and siblings. Moreover, schools are considered as a main factor of the development of children's experiences. Therefore, it is not possible to categorise them as being less important than the experiences gained at home. Consequently, it is seen that they should complement each other.

Keywords: Partnership, Special Educational Needs.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the notion of teacher to parent partnerships has been growing for several years. In the late 1970s, the provision for children with special educational needs in England had been reviewed in the Warnock Report. The report included an important chapter termed 'Parents as Partners' [42]. When looking to the meaning of 'partner', it is found that the Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005) defines a partner as 'a person you are closely involved with in some way'. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1993) defines partnership as 'an association of two or more people as partners'.

It could be seen that the term 'partnership' does not give partners a significant or firm requirement for involvement. Therefore, the essay is inclined to agree with Dale (1996) in without defining the term 'partnership' specifically, it may be utilized loosely to suggest collaboration, without giving the necessary level of joint or equal authority in decision-making, the extent of agreement or disagreement, and the amount of power for each partner. Aside from these aspects, this loose definition will also have an effect on the potential for cooperation [28]

The author believes that there is a need for partnerships

which permits each partner 'to move beyond defensiveness' [28]. In spite of the significant quantity of research in this area, there are still substantial dissimilarities and complexities in defining parental participation [47]. This includes parents, informally, going to schools, as well as formal chances for meetings with teachers or the participation in their children's education and school life[21]. The concept of parental partnership is therefore multidimensional, and contains a huge number of parental actions which are relevant to the child's learning [58]. For an example, there should be parent-to-child and parent-to-teacher communication regarding schooling [24] as well as parental contributions made in school activities [69].

Wolfendale (1983) recognized partnerships as parents who are able to be 'active in decision-making and its implementation; perceived as having equal strengths and equivalent expertise; able to contribute to, as well as receive, services (reciprocity)and able to share responsibility. So that professionals are mutually accountable.' It is referred to the 'equivalent expertise' in order to propose that professionals would be more informed and better able to fulfil their professional objectives if they were to have close partnerships with parents in place. Therefore, it is believed that when a child

has more demanding needs, teachers discover that and they are then obliged to have discussions with parents in order to recognise and assist those needs.

The view of partnership is connected with 'shared understanding, mutual respect and discussion' and the readiness to negotiate [62]. In 2000, Wolfendale emphasised the thought that parents need information, advice and support, when defining the term regarding disabled children. Dale (1996) added that parents of children with special needs ought to play an effective function in identifying and planning for their own child's needs.

From the definitions stated above, this article records the parent-teacher partnership as the relationship which requires mutual respect and complementary expertise, and a readiness and willingness for learning from each other [4]. There should be the realization that the two-parents and teachers are capable of the integrated participation which will reap better education and prospects for the child [10], by enabling parents to be better able to access services and support regarding their children [64].

The Rationale

From the author's own professional experience, the author have become of the opinion that there are various reasons why parents and teachers should work together. The author personally believes that the home-school relationship is absolutely crucial, as both home and school are two of the most critical systems responsible for a child's learning. In addition, the author feels that good collaborative partnerships brings about superior results for children, and allows for developments in a variety of aspects, such as attendance rates, higher attainment, and improvements in social competence. Therefore, parents play a significant role in their children's education by adopting roles of support, learners, helpers, teachers and policy-makers. In addition and for democracy reasons, it is also the right of parents not only to gain access information on the education of their children, but to even access the school's regulations [23].

The importance of building partnerships in education is becoming more widely recognised since it was stated in the Plowden Report (1967) on primary education [29]. The report described parent-teacher partnerships as being 'one of the essentials' for endorsing the achievements of children's education.

Numerous nations are presently adopting policies in order to engage families and parents in their children's schooling [23]. Moreover, it is considered of primary importance that parents maintain their participation in their children's learning [54]. This added contribution also brings about results which are indicative of fewer disciplinary problems [51].

Importantly, some researchers [38] agree that home is the basis of anti-social behavior; therefore, the partnership should do in theory, develop the skills of parents, allowing them to become a greater part of the solution after they were initially part of the problem, with schooling and learning them becoming more effective [39], which does, of course, reap better life-long rewards for the child. Theoretically, helping the parents should in turn, raise standards, by giving parents the right to interact with the school, which will subsequently result in an increase in quality of education provided at schools [28]; [4]. In addition, to that studies have also proved that partnerships which are established between home and school are advantageous not only to children but also to the parents, teachers and schools in general. Parents will benefit by improving their self-worth, social networks, and will increase the desire to further their own education [18] and general understanding about the school, teaching and learning activities [29]. It will also benefit the teachers in enhancing their satisfaction [77]; while the schools will be more accountable to the society which funds them [29]. It does not only reinforce the programme but, in addition, it also maintains special effects of the programme upon completion [14].

Many books have been written on the topic of partnerships with parents in general as well as on the subject of children with disabilities. In addition, several government and non-governmental agents have emphasized the importance of parent-to-teacher partnerships generally, and particularly with parents of

disabled children, which has never been a stronger subject .

In 1993, the National Commission on Education reported that effective partnership with parents is one of the seals of an effective school. After identifying the value of the partnership for children. The government then advocated that services for parents of disabled children should be based upon partnership philosophy [34], [35],[36] as such, this has been recommended by the Council for Disabled Children [19].

In 2007, it was emphasized that how important it is that parents are involved with policies involving their children, and that it is notably crucial to enhance how Government services could engage all family members within their children's education system. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to locate the views of parents at the Government's heart, and to discover new ways of involving parents.

There are several reasons for this belief, which have emerged through a great deal of studies. For instance, parent-teacher partnerships offer extra human resources. Bastiani (1993) also note that researchers have established several studies which have been conducted in Britain, which demonstrate that there is real development in the academic level of students when the parents play active roles. Docking (1990) also demonstrates that the performance and motivation of pupils is far better in schools which have active involvement from parents in both visits and education. Also in their studies, Ball (1998) and Wolfendale (1983) attributed that there is significant great development in students' reading skills and the level of material, when efforts between parents and teachers are coordinated. Hornby's (1995) own experience is one of the most vital, which proves the feasibility of work with parents as teachers.

The Models of Involving Parents

A review of the literature on parents' participation reveals several models which can be implemented [27]; [3] in order to fulfil the objective of establishing firmer, long-term parent-teacher relationships. The author believe that these models ought to be deemed as ideas rather than obligatory guides for practice, since having a broader sense of partnership scope and some space for unexpected thoughts or creative ideas from parents (depending on the situation) is significant.

Cunningham and Davis (1985) describe three different models for explaining parent-to-professional relations, which are the 'Expert model', 'Transplant model' and 'Consumer model'. Appleton and Minchom (1991) delineated the forth model, the Empowerment model, which gives the right to decide a service and its level with a professional acknowledgment, which is most appropriate for them. Dale (1996) also suggests a fifth model which is the Negotiating model, regarding negotiation as a key element for parent-professional cooperation.

Firstly, the Expert model is similar to the traditional model where professionals deal with the child without active relationships with parents [70]. It considers that professionals know what is better for parents and, consequently, do not deal with them as responsible and equivalent partners. It leaves parents feeling that they are not capable of deserving inclusion in making decisions [13] for their own children, and this incorporates the outlook whereupon teachers regard themselves as professionals and, therefore, parents have to respect them. Moreover, they also believe that parents are supposed to maintain their distance and recognise their position as they do with other professionals [35]. It is such as the common attitude expressed, which is 'No Parents beyond This Line' [41].

The majority of developing countries follow this model — which works like a top-down method with both parents and professionals tending to be seemingly content with this model, and that might be because parents think that giving the duty to the professionals might reduce the stress they themselves will personally have to encounter [57]. Moreover, it is believe from author's own experience that it is a cultural consideration: Teachers want parents to be involved but they do not want partnerships with parents or to be equal with them [53]. Although this model reduces parents' stress and responsibilities, it is solely dependent on the professionals, and so the benefit of this sort of

partnership simply cannot be achieved if the child and his or her parents do not actively and effectively participate in school functions [6]. This concept is similar to the doctor–patient affiliation where upon the teacher in this case would use his or her expertise in order to make decisions and have control of what is necessary to be completed. Moreover, the participation of parents is not of principal significance, and is restricted to merely providing data.

Secondly, there is the Transplant model. This model emerged in the early 1970s [20], and is of the theory that the teacher knows what should be completed and what parents ought to be doing at home. It theorises that parents could be more involved in the affairs of their children's school, and that they should be more determined and able to participate more effectively in that area.

Such a model helps parents to achieve satisfaction, and makes them feel less dependent on teachers in the affairs of teaching their children. However, from author's own experience, the author personally believe that not all parents have the ability or the skills to do so. McGaw (1997) states that there are approximately 250,000 parents with learning difficulties which are recognized to health and social agencies in the UK.

The role of a teacher is to split their expertise. In other words, their aim is to transplant their knowledge to parents, and to assist them to be like teachers, such as with the Portage programme and as a 'paired reading programme' where parents are taught to assist the reading of their child at home [70]. They should not be shown as 'unused resources' for assisting in teaching their own child [49]. However, teachers also have the eventual right for decision making and overburdening the parent [50].

Thirdly, there is the Consumer model. In this case, parents are considered as a consumer for teacher's services [50]. The partnership between the teacher and parents is established to the extent that their participation is merely evaluation and decision-making [51]. The best advantages of this model is the upgrading of schools,

which makes the teacher seek to achieve what the parents desire even when it is sometimes opposed to the educational and methodological foundations [38]. In this model, the power shifts from teachers to parents. This model makes use of the notion from the market: The parents are shown as service consumers; they are recognized as experts in relation to their children's needs and, as consumers, they take control of making decisions since they utilize their expertise concerning the services they want and need for their children. However, this model is considered as being an uncomfortable model[75] since it is only advantageous to some parents and not all.

The Empowerment model [60] highlights the need for empowering parents while also dealing with professionals. The Empowerment model also provides parents with the right to choose; there is a professional acknowledgment of the family which is made up of interdependent relations, and which has significant effects on how parents are able to handle their responsibilities, and the sort of support they will require. In the empowerment model, the role of the teacher is to assist in the empowering of the parents, and to encourage them to meet their requirements, rather than to make decisions regarding their needs. However, it creates broad suppositions concerning how parents ought to act, and has to presume the schools are performing properly [61].

The Negotiating model details that both parents and teachers have helpful and separate contributions to offer. In addition, the different perspectives are the key to building successful partnerships which bring about positive judgement and results for the child. This model suggests how teachers and parents may negotiate in order to attain a judgment; the notion of this model is that parents and professionals have different and helpful contributions to present, and the dissimilarities in viewpoints is a positive way of enriching partnerships in order to ensure that the most appropriate decisions for children are made. This model is implemented with the view — as different studies have shown — that parents' views are valuable. However, from author's own experience, the opinion agreements can be made between some teachers and parents, not all types of

parents are willing to formulate agreements and relationships.

The author also believes that some or all of the five models of the partnerships between teachers or parents as identified by Dale are reflected in which schools actually involve parents. From the reading, there is a gradual move to the Empowerment model, whereupon an appropriate model leads to a successful partnership for most parents as equals, about with their knowledge being respected, their wants being considered, them being kept well-informed of their child's condition and progress, their difficulties confronted and acknowledged, and their sense of control being promoted. In addition, the Negotiation model should also be implemented in order to make decisions for the purpose of attaining a communal perspective [22].

From author's own experience, it is important to choose a model according to what is most appropriate for the child's needs. It is vital to recognise that all forms of parental involvement and partnership are potentially very valuable [43]. For example, the Expert model is suitable if parents do not have the time, inclination, ability or experience to be effective partners, which are equally responsible with teachers. Moreover, from the authors experience, the way in which a partnership is noticeably diverse. Vincent (1996) recognized four sorts of parents such as 'Detached parents', who desire professionals to have complete responsibility; 'Independent parents', who have a desire for close participation but do not have plenty of confidence to start; 'Supportive parents', who are willingly involved with invitations and propositions; and 'Irresponsible parents', who show uncooperative behaviour with regards to their child's education.

The Challenges

There is a wide range of literature available on the barriers to parent-teacher participation [47]. It is believed that the challenges which teachers face are dependent of the chosen model which he or she sees as being able to establish an effective partnership approach.

Teachers who should be committed to working closely with parents are fully aware of the difficulties and challenges which this work poses [15], and, frequently, policy-makers are looking to positively establish parental partnerships in schools. This consideration is impacted by the hypothetical optimistic influence of parental partnership in children's education. However, the results of some researchers on the effect of parents' partnerships on children are not consistent due to of a number of different aspects [30],[31], [68], [76]. For example, policy-makers frequently mention the positive influences of parent partnerships, yet there is also the note that discrepancies are not withstood. However, according to Vincent (1996), the benefits of parental partnership in daily schooling is not constantly obvious, and the arguments surrounding parental partnerships is frequently superficial. One reason for this could be the consensual language used, such as 'involvement', 'partnership', or 'sharing', which is powerfully featured in the literature [73]. These words propose a 'warm community spirit', which is not entirely accomplished in reality where parents' participation is more varied and complex. In fact, the relationship between parents and schools is often characterized by power struggles instead of equal partnerships. Moreover, an excess of participation of parents may make the child suffer, causing the child to feel insecure and generate a fear of failure, and it could possibly negatively affect the school's organisational dynamics, particularly the teacher's role[72]

The parent-teacher partnership is not as simple as it might initially seem. Besides, it is found that Waller (1961) labels teachers and parents as 'natural enemies' owing to their divided perspective, while the literature, on the other hand, presents confirmations of the values of teacher-parent partnerships, and displays problems which teachers face when working closely with parents as partners. Carpenter (2001) states that the difficulty lies with the parents who are difficult to reach, and limited, or are unwilling to work as a partner, which ultimately makes the teacher sometimes feel frustrated in involving parents in the children's affairs .

Gascoigne (1995) sees that each party in this partnership has a vision and a different point of view, and exercises its role according to its own concept of the needs of the

child, which then creates a conflict and difference of interest. Moreover, teachers themselves could be a cause of the failure of the partnership when they show a form of dominating power to the parents .

Common Challenge Factors

The following are some examples of the general challenges which might occur in the teacher-parent partnership. Firstly, it is possible — and somewhat likely — that there will be a lack of trust. This could happen due to historical reasons; teachers and parents move forwards with preconceived ideas regarding one another. Parents and teachers, because of their reminiscences of school, may feel defensive [40]. Therefore, if they do not like it or experience problems, they will find it difficult to trust each other.

Secondly, distance is a factor, and not only an objective barrier. For example, distance can be established with the introduction of seemingly harmless factors, Thus, the other person does not have an opportunity to converse or give his or her view which creates a lack of clarity [52].From author's own experience, a good solution for this is that teachers could provide printed materials and send it to parents before meetings.

It is impossible to make decisions without bringing previous background and understanding into the determination. Therefore, it is vital to be aware of different cultures as they might inhibit the decision. Moreover, political belief and psychological belief can also play a role, which is why some parents differ so much: While some may co-operate more, others feel naturally aggressive and defensive towards teachers.

Another contributing factor is the lack of time, which is one of the significant reasons for parents not being as engaged in schooling to the extent that they could be, especially for those parents who work full-time or for single parents [47].

Most parents see the main limitation to contributing in their child's learning as occurring from the restrictions of employment [2]; [26]. In particular, parents of children with disabilities are also further stretched, as they also need to make time for several other professionals. The author

believe that teachers ought to arrange the time for parents to be engaged to the level that they feel they could manage to, and the meeting of schedules should be more flexible: Mornings, evenings or weekends should be available in order to give every parent the opportunity to attend. Parents should be made to feel like they can make a difference to their child within their limits, and encouraging partnerships now might save a lot of time later on in the process.

Moreover, there is a difference in attitude [41] with parental experience of education being yet another contributing factor. Generally, teachers feel that this is one of the greatest barrier [46], which shows that parents experience difficulties when talking to teachers, since they see schools as places of failure and conflict. On the other hand, teachers see parents as problems, adversaries, vulnerable, less able, needing treatment, and causal and parents appear to be not interested and as having a lack of skills. However, from author's experiences, he believes that teachers should recognise that parents are individuals and acknowledge the structure of the family.

Analysing the Root Cause of Barriers

From author's experience,the barriers are divided into three main parts, which are Teachers, Parents, and Partnerships. It is apparent that teachers have diverse thoughts concerning partnerships and parents, and they fear encountering disagreement. In addition, their lack of time or funding causes them to feel overworked and underpaid, and they do not have the skills for effective collaboration. Parents, on the other hand, feel that they are powerless concerning skills or knowledge, and therefore, less self-confident. They may have had negative past experiences, and economic, social and time constraints.

In addition, there are also some other barriers to partnerships, such as the lack of trust within the teacher-parent partnership, different perspectives regarding children's learning, and the added consideration that the partnership structure is also unclear due to the inconvenience of rushed routines and tight schedules.

Partnership with Parents of Disabled Children

Although this paper sees a commonality across all parents, it also recognises that parents of disabled children have distinctive aspects. It is more complicated because of the unique characteristics of individual family circumstances It is believed that it is not unexpected that disagreements may occur because of the child's difficulties and the suitable ways of coping with them. Besides, many challenges may occur to the partnership in both the identification and assessing phases. Teachers who are dedicated to promoting and assisting children with special educational needs and working with their parents as partners, will be completely conscious of the challenges involved [15].

Parents of disabled children need more information, guidance, support, practical assistance, advice, and to be engaged at each phase, such as the identification and assessment of their child's needs [34]. As needs for these parents are generated, such as social and emotional needs they will need to be assisted in order to adjust to their new situations. If there is the support in place, the parents will feel better able to continuously care for their child and face the continuous challenges, and facilitate the need to understand new knowledge with regards to their own child's needs [66]. Moreover, additional concern can be aroused when trying to understand information, accessing many services and working with different workers who might not be coordinated [9]. As a result, some parents may subsequently become dependent, passive, feel isolated or lose confidence. Nevertheless, some parents deal well with that, and problems are not inevitable [6].

When dealing with parents of children with special needs, teachers need to keep in mind that their partnerships with these parents are extremely significant due to their increased importance for the children whose development and education are at risk, as per the Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model emphasises. Moreover, their children frequently cause pressures on the whole family with, for example, the day after day caring, the sleep disturbance, and the monetary stresses [41]. Moreover, their behaviours result in public embarrassment [46], which causes the parents to have less time for their other children, which leads to feelings of isolation and a lack of support [32]. Therefore, it is important to deal with these parents empathically when both listening and practically assisting. Moreover, teachers should also respect the parents' additional expectations regarding the quality of education and the child's academic improvement and happiness [34].

The Model of Hornby citing parents' participation, characterises the hierarchical needs of parents, strengths and potential involvements in their children's schooling [49]. Hornby argues that while parents are able to participate by giving information concerning their child, barely a few are eager to contribute in, for instance, to improve the policies of schools. Therefore, it is believed that it is the teachers' responsibility is to assist parents to reflect their feelings and to achieve their aspirations, while also inspiring them by facilitating the involvement [11].

Recommendation to Overcome the Challenges

This paper believes that partnerships can overcome all the challenges which might occur, but only if the relationship is based on equality and mutual respect. Teachers must strive to understand and respect each individual's and family's privacy [55], knowing and understanding the need to work to participate in order to ensure all information, skills and experience in decision-making is put to the best value. Moreover, when any barrier arises, they ought to look for the suitable ways to resolve the dispute [12].

As some studies have found, if teachers encourage all parents to contribute, the results would show higher parental participation, even with those 'hard to reach families' [67]. Simon (2004) proved that when teachers reached out to families and made contact with them regarding the supervision of homework, they responded more often which boosted parental contributions even from those who tended to be less engaged in school activities, such as single parents and undereducated parents [45];[33]. Therefore, the family's involvement ought to not be limited to a young person's parents, but besides might include any or all others members at the

home [65].

Conclusion

This paper has examined the importance of knowing and understanding the family structure, and defining partnerships as giving a balance of power for both parents and teachers, who should select a model of partnership which is dependent on the parents themselves, and which works best for all parties involved. Furthermore, parents are supposed to be seen as fundamental partners in their children's education; therefore, the paper then discussed the common challenges experienced, such as the lack of time and the parents and teacher attitude towards each other. In addition, good partnerships and welcoming schools [8] have been discussed in a way which can overcome any barriers. Moreover, this paper has addressed the additional needs of parents of disabled children who experience pressures with regards to their disabled children, the parents themselves and the whole family generally.

Acknowledgement

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