ÇOCUKLARIN OKUMA VE YAZMA ÖĞRENMESİNE AİLENİN KATKILARI

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S LITERACY LEARNING

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ÖZET

Bu makalede, çocukların dil öğrenimi ve dilin öğrenilmesi sürecinde ailelerin yapabilecekleri etkinlikler konusunda yeni düşünceler sunulmuştur. Ayrıca çocukların ev ortamından okul ortamına geçişini ve uyumunu sağlamada ailelerin uygulayabilecekleri programlar tanıtılmıştır.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, new insights are offered into ways young children's language and literacy learning can be enhanced through parental involvement. Programs that help parents ease their children's transition from home to school are described.

INTRODUCTION

The decade of the nineties is witnessing a resurgence of interest in gains to be made from parental participation in programs targeting the education of young children. The attention appears to be emanating from two different sources simultaneously. One phase of attention stems from the increased participation of mothers in the labor force and their subsequent need for child care services within and outside the home. This development has, in part, sparked the current advocacy for closer partnership between families and professionals who work in early childhood programs. A second observation is the growing number of studies affirming the extent that families and other related household factors influence children's cognitive and literacy development in the early years. The concern of this perspective is to encourage the development of strategies that would best educate and support parental involvement in the partnership.

Consistent with the attention and research devoted to describing the general benefits of school/parent partnership, new light is being focused on the importance of parental involvement in children's literacy learning experiences in the home and in school settings. Traditional as well as current theoretical perspectives affirm this idea:

• Views of parents as the child's "first and foremost teacher" have dominated social reform movements since the publication of an infant education handbook by John Amos Comenius, 1592-1679 (Fein, 1980).

• Piagetian theory indicates that children's development can be hindered or advanced in certain environments in which children learn and grow; especially at home and school (Morrison, 1980).

• Research studies generated in the 1960s and 1970s indicated that family variables were more powerful than school variables in predicting academic performance (Colemen, et. al, 1966; Jencks et. al., 1972).

• In addition, the period from the 80s to this present era has been marked by a new surge of thoughtful standards and guidelines concerning appropriate professional practices in early childhood programs. One case in point is the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) decision to include staff-parent interaction as a necessary criteria for high quality programs. Another is the way the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs use their standards to accredit programs for young children (1984).

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Current research builds on the work of John and Evelyn Dewey (1915/1962), who described the functional learning that children acquire before they enter school. More recently, Teale and Sulzby (1989), building on the foundation established by Marie Clay (1982), have provided new ways of thinking about children's literacy. One conclusion is that new perspectives no longer describe literacy as simply a cognitive skill. Rather, literacy is now viewed as a multifaceted activity involving social, linguistic, and psychological factors, all of which are uniquely linked to children's home and school experiences.

Prevalant in the profession are certain concepts of literacy which describe the various types of involvement parents may embrace as partners in helping their children learn. They include ways parents involve their children in literacy experiences at home and in the community. They also include opportunities for parents to learn new ways to help their children learn; ways for parents and children to be co-learners together, and ways for children to learn with other intergenerational members of the family.

Parental involvement as a major concern for program developers rests on two fundamental points. The first is to ensure that parents are engaged in and feel they are in control of their lives and lives of their children. The second is to ensure that the impact of the educational program is sustained throughout its duration. Parents must have the opportunity to acquire certain skills to make the most of this participation.

For the purpose of this discussion, parental involvement in literacy learning is defined as a "strategy for increasing the educational effectiveness of the time that parents and children spend with one another at home" (Becker & Epstein, 1982 p.85). Parents' effectiveness is enhanced when they are made aware of the program's goals and when they are provided with suggestions concerning ways to help children meet those goals.

LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

Do parent and staff collaborations in early childhood programs enhance parental involvement effectiveness? A considerable amount of research has been conducted targeting the effects of parent involvement in educational programs that serve young children. In an extensive review of the literature on the effects of early intervention, Bronfenbrenner (1974) concluded that "the involvement of the child's family as an active participant is critical to the success (of) any intervention program" (p.55).

Deborah Brandt's (1992) ongoing research lends strong support to the scholarly views which show that learning to read and speak are more strongly associated with the home than the development of any other literacy skill. Brandt's literacy data are derived from interviewing generations of families. Based on these interviews, she concludes that children's early reading experiences are directly associated with moments of intimacy between parents and children.

As identified by Brandt's (1992) research, literacy has been targeted as essential by social and political advocates, it is central to the school's curriculum, and it is highly prioritized on the agenda of developing and industrialized countries. The important role of parental involvement is clearly evidenced in the development of children's literacy skills. In circumstances of family intimacy, in family routines of child raising, in various religious rituals and social events, parents frequently call on their children to demonstrate reading and other related literacy skills learned under their tutelage.

Some researchers contend that the benefits of parental involvement in children's education rests heavily on issues of continuity and discontinuity. It is suggested that discontinuity between home and school is a primary cause for the high incidence of school failure among many low income populations. This view has led to the conclusion that education is more effective when children are taught in a context that is consistent with their culture (Tharp, 1989).

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT INCREASES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Activities involving parents appear to be designed with several purposes in mind. One purpose is to promote parent-teacher collaboration in the overall interest of the children's success in schools. A second purpose is to provide more opportunities for children to participate in language and learning activities which bridge the gap between the two learning environments: the home and the school. A third, but no less important purpose is to assist in ways that will prove beneficial to the academic performance of those children who are experiencing difficulty (Crawford, 1985).

A number of reports build strong cases for the involvement of parents as partners in their children's learning experiences. Ladouse (1988) reports that children spend about eight percent of their time with

teachers, leaving parents with access to their children for much of the remaining 92 percent.

A study conducted to measure public attitudes toward home schooling in America revealed that the majority of the respondents believe parents should have the legal right to educate their children at home (Gallup & Elam, 1988). Public opinion, therefore, holds that parents can contribute to their children's literacy learning in the home. Hannon & Cuckle (1984) interviewed teachers, head teachers, and students. Their study focused on the children who took reading books from school to home and read them to their parents. A majority of the teachers, head teachers, and students believed that reading school books to parents, and getting their feedback was a useful way to improve early reading skills.

In a two year study, Burkett (1982) observed a home visitation program in which paraprofessionals were trained to help parents to increase their children's achievement. The results of the study showed that a home visitation program significantly enhanced preschool pupils' reading achievement.

Neidermayer (cited in Graue, et. al. 1983) conducted a study on the effect of parental teaching on the reading readiness skills of kindergarten students. The Parent Assisted Learning Program (PAL) was designed to help parents learn how to teach their children. This program enabled interested parents to go to the school and learn how to conduct exercise sessions at home. Reading sight words, recognizing and pronouncing beginning and ending sounds, and other related skills were practiced. After twelve weeks of school and home instruction PAL students scored higher on a test of reading readiness than children who did not practice PAL program. This study affirms the effectiveness of teaching parents how to help their children learn to read.

Informational and training programs, which are designed to instruct parents in the teaching of reading and to encourage their active participation, have resulted in significant increases in the reading attitudes and achievement of children. The research indicates that parents who participate in their children's learning can stimulate their children's educational development. These parents have been found to assist their children in setting goals and selecting reading materials, to engage their children in discussions about the books they are reading, and to provide help with homework (Hansen, 1969; Wells, 1978; Teale, 1978). The authors believe that parents may assist their children by helping them with homework. This is an additional opportunity for a child to use and represent his/her own ability in reading. Homework is also a device for feedback between school, parents, and students.

Many studies indicate that children whose parents read to them on a regular basis (from four to seven times a week) exhibit more positive attitudes and higher achievement levels in reading than do children whose parents do not read to them (Romatowski and Trepanier, 1977). Children whose parents initiated talks with them about the books the children were reading ,exhibited significantly higher reading achievement scores and more highly developed and expanded concepts than children whose parents did not (Silvern, 1985). Moreover, children with positive attitudes and high achievement levels in reading often appear to come from homes in which there is a wide range of reading materials available (Sheldon and Carillo, 1952; Teale, 1978). When parents themselves read and model the reading process, their children appear to have more positive attitudes toward reading and higher achievement scores than children whose parents do not read (Hansen, 1969; Dix, 1976). National Opinion Polls affirm research conclusions that parents who expected their children to learn to read and who rewarded their achievement through praise and reading-related activities had children with higher achievement scores and more positive attitudes toward reading (Gallup & Elam, 1988).

TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Student performance, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced positively by involving parents in children's learning and school activities. Epstein (cited in Brandt, 1989) determined several types of parent involvement which require different materials and processes, and lead to different outcomes. The first type of involvement is called 'parenting'. In this type, parents are responsible for the children's health and safety, for supervising and disciplining their children, and for creating a positive home environment that supports school learning.

A second type of involvement is 'communicating'. Communication from school to home is emphasized to inform the parents about their children's school progress. 'Volunteering' is the third type of involvement. During this involvement parents participate as school volunteers, assist teachers, administrators, and children. 'Recruit and train parent leaders' is another type of parental involvement. At this level parents take active roles in the decision making process in the PTA/PTO, in advisory councils, on a district or state level.

'Learning at home' is another type of involvement (Epstein cited in Brandt, 1989). In the Epstein/Brandt report, the phrase 'Learning at home' refers to parent

initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help to learn to read. Teachers provide some instructions for the parents to monitor or assist their children at home in learning tasks. These instructions are coordinated with the children's classwork. Homework, a central element of the learning at home paradigm, is emphasized because it increases the interaction between school and parents. Interaction with the child as a student at home, support and encouragement of school work, and participation in the child's education, are expected outcomes of this model for parents. Expected outcomes for students are the completion of homework, enhanced self-concept, and demonstrated achievement in practiced skills.

A few basic principals may also inspire parents' proactive participation.

• **Talking and Reading.** When children are very young, reading must move beyond being a quiet, solitary activity to include lots of talk which arouses the desire to read alone later. Story telling, getting dressed, marketing (especially in the supermarket) are some ideal activities for children ages four to nine.

• **Listening.** Learning to read also means learning to listen. Young children need to be exposed to many opportunities to listen to sounds and to enjoy short-term silence games. They delight in being challenged to listen to a sound and accurately tell what they have heard. Rhyming games, activities set to music, and word games provide marvelous opportunities to enhance literacy and language learning skills among three to five year olds.

• **Writing.** Word scrambles give children practice in recognizing and understanding the printed word. Parents may perform a number of very simple tasks to launch this activity. For example, parents may print words on separate slips of paper, ask children to put compound words together and later build sentences, and name groups of words that belong together such as baseball, football, tennis. These are only few examples of the varied educational activities parents and children can enjoy together.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS AND PARENTS COLLABORATE?

A few essential elements which would enhance parental involvement in children's learning activities at home and school are suggested in the following.

Construct needs assessment. The first task is to determine whether parents want to be involved in their children's literacy and language learning activities. In order to conduct a needs assessment, personal interviews should be conducted during home visits. After conducting the needs assessment, the broad goals and objectives of the program are written. A possible schedule for meetings and parental activities in the school and in the home may also be developed.

Develop written policy. A written policy can help both staff and parents better to understand the objectives of the program.

Implement training and development. Opportunities should be provided for parents to improve their capabilities and to enhance their self confidence. Well-designed programs make training available for parents as well as staff. Training is necessary at the beginning of the school year for parents to get ideas about how to teach their child and how to support school learning at home.

Keep communication clear and open. Communication between school and home should occur on a regular basis. Well established communication helps parents feel comfortable about coming to school, sharing ideas, and speaking their concerns. In turn, school staff do not feel threatened by input from parents, and they use it to design relevant learning activities for students.

Implement evaluation. Well-designed parent involvement programs should include provisions for assessment and evaluation on a regular basis. Such practices would enable parents, teachers and school staff to make program revisions collectively on a continual basis to ensure that program activities are reinforcing the programs' overall purposes of strengthening partnership and learning.

Develop a lending library. Schools and parents can collaborate to construct a lending library which contains toys, games, books, videos, and patterns for making toys. Some of the toys may be loaned over a given period of time or given to parents. Teach parents how to identify good literacy books.

Design curriculum. Schools can involve parents in designing developmentally appropriate curriculum activities for use at home with their children. Included among the activities would be guidelines for using toys and materials taken out on loan from the lending library.

Portfolio development. As school and parent participation become more involved with time, procedures for assessment will be essential. A portfolio containing samples of children's comments and children's work can aid in assessing their development. In addition, check lists can be constructed based on

parent teacher collaboration for parents to use to record childrens' involvement in the unrestricted natural setting of the home environment, the children's interest, the combination of parent and school ideas, and the parents' enthusiasm.

BENEFITS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

This paper has addressed observations of the need for educators to recognize the importance of parental involvement in children's overall literacy development. Central to this discussion were four assumptions: 1) parents are the first teachers of pupils, 2) basic literacy skills are commonly acquired from the family and community environment in which pupils live, 3) parent involvement in literacy activities increases the children's achievement; 4) parents must be deliberate and active participants in initiating and teaching reading activities, both in formal (school) and informal (home) circumstances.

Because teachers are well-trained to interact with students, their role in involving parents is crucial. When the partnership is satisfactory several benefits are realized:

Parents are better able to define appropriate levels of expectations for children's reading achievement. They improve their parenting skills through workshops and parent/teacher conferences, and they feel good about themselves and their abilities as parents.

Teachers cultivate a strong relationship with parents as partners for learning and they gain valuable resources when they involve parents in the school's program.

Children recognize the link between learning to read at school and learning to read at home; they see parents as an integral part of their learning to read experiences. They begin to teach their parents about their daily school activities, and they feel the value of their education as their parents take the time to participate in their learning activities.

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