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Parent Involvement in an Urban Head Start Classroom

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Parent Involvement in an Urban Head Start Classroom

By

Stephanie Whitmire

A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how to build a stronger connection between home and school literacy in preschool. To do this, I interviewed parents of my students to talk about the types of activities they do at home with their child. I also wanted to find out what barriers or challenges they face in being involved with their child's education, and how I can help support them to help overcome the challenges. In doing this, I hope to create a stronger relationship with the families, and learn more about their funds of knowledge in order to bridge the gap between home and school, and build a stronger relationship with the families I serve.

Introduction

As we get ready to go to the muscle room, a few children are patiently awaiting their parents' arrival. We are having a parent involvement activity today, where children pick out a pumpkin or gourd from over 200 that a farm has delivered to our inner-city center. Five of my students have told me that their parents were coming to help them pick out their pumpkin, which they were invited to do. We walk into the muscle room, and the children's eyes light up at all of the different kinds of pumpkins. The children start to pick out their pumpkins, and as I look over, two children are just standing by the door looking upset. I go over to talk with them, and find out that they are sad because their parents told them they would come help them pick out pumpkins, and they never showed up. After talking with the children for a few minutes, I go with them to help them pick out the pumpkins they want to take home. When all was said and done, one parent ended up coming to help their child, out of the 30 children that I have between my two classes, and I find myself wondering: Why are many parents not attending school events, and how can I get more parents to come?

Problem Statement

The lack of parent involvement at this event is not an uncommon occurrence. We have had multiple family events so far this year, and have not had more than four parents or family members from my classes show up to them. Even when parents send back forms that say they are going to come to events, they still do not. When homework is sent home every week, we will only get a few back from both classes. The homework usually consists of a few activities for a parent or family member to do with their child, or a worksheet to complete. My assistant teacher and I know that language may be a barrier for some of our families, as well as time. We have four children whose parents speak little to no English. Some of these students have older siblings

that help them with their homework and fill out papers that we send home, but others have no one at home that understand English. My center does not offer any translation services; it relies on the parents to find someone to translate for them. Other parents may work the evening/night shift at their jobs, and older siblings or daycare watches the children after school and at night. I want to find out what challenges the parents of my students face in completing the activities involved with the homework, and what I can do to or change to make it more convenient for them to complete it. I am also interested in finding other ways that I can value families, and bridge the home-school connection.

One reason I send home homework each week is because my center is funded by a grant, and my center gets credit when parents fill out the homework time card and return it completed. My partner and I come up with the activities we send home for the children to do each week. A problem with this is that parents may be doing activities at home with their children that may not be ones I have given them, or ones that I may even consider. This is why I want to investigate what activities families do at home, learn more about what families value, and try to incorporate the families' interests into the assignments and school events.

Rationale

Much research has been done to support the importance of parent involvement in the early childhood years, especially when it comes to the home literacy environment and activities done at home. Increased parent involvement in children's education can lead to positive school readiness outcomes, and increased cognitive and social-emotional development (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2009; DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey, & Sundman-Wheat, 2015; Hammer, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2010; Mendez, 2010). Not only does increasing parent involvement at home

and school have positive effects on students' education, but bringing in students' and families' funds of knowledge into the classroom, and valuing our families' cultural identities, increases school performance, and helps strengthen the connection between home and school (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Riojas-Cortez, Flores, & Clark, 2003).

Children need their parents to be involved in their education, and starting the trend in preschool will set them up for greater success as they get older. Homework only gets harder, and children learn more. They start to see other parents showing up to events at school, and begin to wonder why their parents are not there. This project will investigate the types of activities parents do with their children, how they are currently involved with their child's education, and barriers or challenges they face when it comes to being involved. Through my research, I hope to gain insight into how I as a teacher can value families and their funds of knowledge, to create a greater connection between home and school, and in turn increase parent involvement. As I interview parents, I hope to gain a better understanding of both the successes and struggles they face when it comes to their educational involvement with their child.

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone project was to investigate the types of activities families do at home with their preschool-aged child, what barriers or challenges they faced in being involved with their child's education, and how I can help support them to help overcome the challenges. I also hoped to create a stronger relationship with the families, and learn more about their funds of knowledge in order to incorporate it into my lessons and activities. In doing so, I hoped to create a greater bond with the families, and help them to increase their involvement with their child's education.

Research Questions

This capstone project looked to answer the following questions: How can I help parents of low-income preschoolers in order to increase parent involvement at home and school? How can I, and the center, support families in my classroom in order for them to be involved in their child's education in the way that they wish to be? In what ways are families already involved, and how can I use this to strengthen the home-school connection?

Literature Review

Introduction

There has been a lot of research conducted on the importance of parent involvement throughout a child's life, including during early childhood and the preschool years. Researchers have focused on the effects of school-based involvement and home-based involvement on children's development and outcomes. Some researchers implemented new programs and interventions to try and improve parent involvement (Elias, Hay, Homel, & Freiberg, 2006; Mendez, 2010). Research has also been done on the importance of culturally responsive teaching, and using families' funds of knowledge to create a stronger connection between home life and school life. Building partnerships between schools and families can have positive effects on children's educational outcomes and their self-identity.

Home-Based Involvement

Home-based parent involvement can look different for every family. Some families may read together, sit down and do homework, and work on academic activities together. Others may cook meals together, play games, or participate in other activities that are important to them. No matter what it looks like, parent involvement in the home is important for student success in school.

Programs for Families

In order to increase home-based parent involvement, some researchers create programs for families to participate in that can give them the tools and knowledge they need to either become more involved with their child at home, or create more meaningful experiences at home.

In her qualitative study, Mendez (2010) created an intervention called The Companion Curriculum (TCC), to enhance school readiness in preschool-aged children by increasing parent involvement, and strengthening parent-teacher relationships. The intervention had four key elements: staff training on how the intervention worked; Family Corners, an area in the classroom used for adult-child interactions with TCC materials; educational activities for parents to do outside of school with their child; and monthly workshops for parents, where staff demonstrated learning activities for family members to do with their child. Overall, there were high levels of parent satisfaction with this intervention. This study had positive results implementing an intervention program in order to increase parent involvement, which in turn increased school readiness outcomes.

Elias, Hay, Homel, and Freiberg (2006) created a parent-child book reading program, involving parents or guardians in four disadvantaged and culturally diverse schools. The participants did not speak English as their first language. The purpose of the study was to see if frequency and quality of parent-child reading determined later literacy attainment. The program focused on developing socially and culturally relevant materials and created individualized books for each child. Parents who struggled with reading English were encouraged to translate the text in the books into their home language. The results of the study showed that the total number of minutes read per week for all participants more than doubled.

The results of these studies show that not only can programs be put into place to increase parent involvement, but also that parent involvement has a positive correlation to child outcomes in school.

Benefits

Several studies have shown that home-based parent involvement provides many benefits to children. Hammer, Farkas, and Maczuga (2010) investigated the frequency of home literacy activities and the impact they have on language and literacy outcomes of children from low-income families. The researchers used previously gathered data from the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) and analyzed characteristics of the child and family, looking to see if any characteristics impacted children's literacy outcomes. The results showed that the frequency of home literacy activities impacted children's vocabulary abilities, reading abilities, and letter-word knowledge. When parents engage in more literacy activities with their child at home, the child has better literacy outcomes at school.

Chazan-Cohen et al., (2009) investigated how the parenting of low-income families over the first five years of a child's life can impact their school readiness at kindergarten entry. The researchers wanted to find out if we can predict school readiness at kindergarten by measuring parenting at 14 months. The researchers also wondered if parenting changes during the first five years of life could impact school readiness. The authors looked at Early Head Start children and families, and collected data on primary predictors and child outcomes. Primary predictors included: symptoms of the mother's depression, parenting stress, the home learning environment, and if the parent used supportive parenting. The child outcomes looked at: problem behaviors, positive approaches to learning, emotion regulation, receptive vocabulary, and letter-word knowledge. The results of this study showed that looking at parenting styles and choices when

the child is 14 months old, as well as parenting styles changing positively over the first five years, is predictive of increased child outcomes. Parents who created an optimal learning environment for their child at 14 months, as well as those who increased their home learning environment over the first five years, had children who had better approaches toward learning, vocabulary scores, and letter-word knowledge as they became closer to starting kindergarten. This study shows more benefits that children have when there is more involvement in their homes.

Incorporating Families' Funds of Knowledge

Funds of Knowledge

One of the goals of my paper is to gain a deeper understanding of my students and their families in order to strengthen the connection between home life and school life. Moll, Amanti, & Neff (1992) define funds of knowledge as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing” (p.133). The researchers propose that teachers use families’ funds of knowledge to bridge the gap between home and school. In order to gain a further understanding of the families, the researchers used different techniques to study households and their funds of knowledge. Another goal of the study was to look at how the families used their funds of knowledge to deal with their often changing surroundings, and how they use their funds to interact with their community and neighbors. Moll et al. (1992) did a case study with ten teachers, where the teachers became teacher-researchers. The teachers went into their students’ homes, talked with the families, and observed them. Both the researchers and the teachers were surprised at the outcomes of allowing the teachers to become researchers. Families seemed to trust the teachers more, and opened up more quickly to them. Amanti, one of the teacher-researchers, “realized that she was starting to

blend her role as a teacher with her new role as researcher...” (p. 136). She, as well as the other teachers, began making connections between what they were experiencing and seeing in the families’ homes, and what they could do in the classroom with this new knowledge. The researchers concluded that gaining a better understanding of a families’ household knowledge, and using it to influence what is taught in the classroom, has positive implications for both teachers and families. It allows families to become active participants in their child’s education, and strengthens the connection between home and school (Moll et al., 1992).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is including students’ culture in the curriculum, and honoring and respecting the culture of all students. Cooper and Hedges (2014) looked at using funds of knowledge and culturally responsive teaching to build and enhance positive relationships between teachers and families of children in an early childhood program. The researchers focused on one particular child, Hunter, and his family, and looked at the specific interests of this child. The teachers found him to have a love for drumming, and used this knowledge to have conversations with his parents. Through these informal conversations, the teachers learned more about Hunter and his family, and that drumming is an important part of their culture. By recognizing his interest in drumming, the teachers helped Hunter to develop his identity and grow as a learner. Cooper and Hedges state, “Validating families’ multiple cultural identities emphasizes the skills and expertise children have in establishing a constantly evolving, dynamic personal identity as they travers a minimum of two cultures, languages and values” (p. 171). By taking such an interest in Hunter and his culture, the relationship between the teacher, the center, and the family was deepened, as the family felt valued and like they were an important part of Hunter’s education (Cooper & Hedges, 2014).

Riojas-Cortez et al., (2003) also looked at how valuing families' home cultural knowledge could improve a low-performing school. The researchers looked at a low-income elementary school in Texas, where 98.7% of the children are Mexican-American, and many are bilingual. The school went from a low performing school to one that is recognized by the state. Part of how they were successful in doing this was that the school district helped the entire community to realize the importance of early childhood education by putting on a five-day parent institute for the early childhood education staff and parents as well as administrators and community leaders. The institute guided "parents and teachers in discovering how simple daily routines are beneficial for children's performance in school" (p. 79). It showed parents how the activities they do every day with their child are important learning experiences, and teachers learned that the experiences children have at home are just as important as the ones they have at school. The staff of the institute helped to strengthen the home-school connection. By putting on this institute, the researchers learned "that culturally and linguistically diverse parents are interested in their children's education... We just need to help families gain the basics of child development and learn everyday strategies that promote optimum benefits" (p. 83).

Community Partnerships

As previous studies have stated, parent engagement has a positive effect on children's academic outcomes. An additional way to increase parent involvement is to bridge the gap between home and school using community partnerships. By going out into the community, teachers and schools can connect to the parents in their communities and neighborhoods. Reece, Staudt, and Ogle (2013) found that increasing parent engagement in school and the neighborhood may be more successful "if the efforts also address the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the parents" (p. 221). In their study, the researchers created the Neighboring Project Parent

Empowerment and Volunteer Readiness Program (Neighboring Project). This project worked with lower income, urban parents, with a goal of increasing parent engagement at home and school. Meetings were held at locations within walking distance of all participants, and children were allowed to come. By attending weekly meetings, parents were equipped with the skills and knowledge to begin taking ownership of their involvement with their child's school and within their neighborhood. The curriculum for the project was based on the needs of the participants, and was comprised of three units: "(1) building the community; (2) building self-esteem; and (3) building engagement and volunteerism" (p.213). The topics at each meeting ranged from how to help their child at home to increasing job-seeking skills. The setup of the meetings was very informal, and participants were encouraged to be involved. They were reassured that they were important to their child's education, and could make a difference in their communities. The results of this project were very positive—even participants who were initially wary about participating came to enjoy coming to the meetings, and many wanted the project to continue. Benefits included gaining confidence to advocate for the children, increased participation in school activities, and more engagement with children at home. Parents reported that they set up daily routines with their children, and talked about the importance of going to and staying in school. Participants also reported that they became more involved in neighborhood activities, and gained a greater sense of community. They were able to be active participants, voicing their opinions and what they wanted and needed to learn. By increasing participants' "skills, knowledge, and sense of self-efficacy, as well as tapping their innate strengths and resources" (p. 207), the Neighboring Project was able to be successful in meeting the goals of increasing parent engagement at home and school (Reece et al., 2013). Building a relationship between the school

and the community can help to make the parents feel more welcome, and in turn they may be more involved at school.

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to make an initial investigation into how I can increase parent involvement in my preschool classroom, and how parents are already involved. I had a diverse group of students, and wanted to find out about what types of activities these families do as a family, that I may not consider as a “traditional” way of being involved. Broadening my perspective of parent involvement, I wanted to learn about my families’ funds of knowledge, in order to incorporate them into our curriculum and classroom. The last thing I looked at is what types of barriers or challenges parents may face in doing more with their child partnering with the school.

Participants

There were seven participants in this study. The participants were parents or family members of children who had a child in one of my two preschool classes during the 2015-2016 school year. The preschool is in the inner city of Rochester, New York. One of my classes was a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom, which is run in conjunction with the Rochester City School District. My other class was a Head Start classroom. The ages of the children ranged from three to five years old. In order to be eligible for this preschool program, families must have been considered low-income. Children received free breakfast and lunch, or lunch and snack. Twenty-nine of the thirty children between my two classes are African American, and one child is from Nepal. Six of my children and families speak English as a second language, with their English language abilities varying from very limited to moderate.

The Smith Family

Kim is a young single mom to a three-year-old daughter, Debbie. Debbie is in my afternoon preschool class. Kim and Debbie live by themselves in an apartment. Debbie often stays with her grandparents when Kim is working one of her two jobs. Kim usually keeps a consistent routine with Debbie when she is not at school. They do a lot of educational activities together, and Debbie is very advanced for her age. Kim will sometimes stay in the classroom when she drops Debbie off or will come early and observe her, when her work schedules allow. She stated, "I want to come to more events and help out more, but I work two jobs and my schedule always changes." Kim often relies on her family for help transporting Debbie back and forth to school, as they live too far away for the school bus to come get her. Kim mentioned that they have thought about transferring Debbie to a center that is closer to her home, but Debbie loves her class and school, so they will wait until next year.

The Johnson Family

Elaine is the mother of four-year-old Robert. Robert is in my morning Universal Pre-Kindergarten class. Elaine and her family, which include Robert's father and maternal grandparents, are recent immigrants from Nepal. They have lived in Rochester for one year, and previously lived in South Dakota. Elaine speaks and understands English at a moderate level, and Robert has a limited knowledge of English. They speak primarily Nepali at home, and Elaine said they do not work on Robert's English skills at home. In my interview with Elaine, she said they get up and ready for school each day, but after school is different depending on who is working. She recently started working, so she is often not home when Robert gets off the bus after school. Elaine said when Robert is at home, he is almost always watching cartoons on the television or someone's phone, or playing games on some sort of electronic device, such as a

phone or tablet. Elaine does work with Robert when we send homework home, and is very consistent in doing it every week. Robert has grown a lot since the beginning of the year, in both his academic skills as well as his English speaking and listening skills. Elaine wishes that Robert could get a spot in a full-day classroom, but there are not openings currently, and there is a long wait list.

The Bay Family

Lisa is a single mom to three-year-old Michael. She also has two other children, an eight-month-old baby and a six-year-old. Lisa has a set routine for her kids that she follows. She said, “We usually follow it, but sometimes it’s just too much and I let the kids do what they want.” In my interview with her, Lisa mentioned how she is often very stressed, and struggles with mental health issues, making it difficult sometimes to do everything she wants with her kids. She told me there are people at the center whom she does not get along with, and it is difficult for her to see them every day. She is working with her doctor on finding medication that will help her without making her groggy and unable to care for the kids. Lisa also has nerve problems, making it difficult for her to walk back and forth to school, as she has a lack of transportation. She lives close enough that Michael cannot ride the bus, so she is already walking back and forth to our center and her daughter’s school to get her as well. Anytime we have an event that is close to the beginning or end of the school day, she attends and always offers to help.

The Stone Family

Sharon is the grandmother of four-year-old Jacob, whom she has custody of. She also has Jacob’s two older siblings, who are eight and twelve. All three children have varying degrees of developmental disabilities. Sharon moved to Rochester from Georgia to take care of her grandchildren when their mother was unable to anymore. She has a lot on her plate, and is self-

admittedly very overwhelmed. She has her own health problems, which make it difficult for her to walk. Sharon and the family live too close to our center to be eligible for the bus, so she is responsible for walking Jacob back and forth to school each day. When the weather is rainy or snowy, Jacob is not usually at school, as the bad weather makes it even more difficult for Sharon to walk. Sharon does not have any other family members to help watch the children, which also means Jacob misses school when Sharon has appointments during school hours, and cannot pick him up in time. Sharon has tried getting help through the Department of Social Services and by staying in contact with the children's Child Protective Services caseworker, but has not had much luck getting the extra help she needs. During her interview, Sharon said, "I know my grandkids need me, but it's hard when all of my family lives in Georgia." Sharon shared that after this school year, she wants to bring the children back down to Georgia with her, where she will have more support from her family.

The Walker Family

Laura is a single mother to Richard, a three-year-old in my afternoon class. Laura has three other children, who are 16-years old and older. The family lives with Laura's parents, who both have dementia and require constant care and supervision. As stated in her interview, this causes Laura to not have as much time to work with Richard as she wished she had. For any school events, she has to find someone to come to the house to watch her parents, which requires a lot of planning. Even with everything else she has going on, Laura makes sure that Richard has a consistent daily routine at home, and sticks with a schedule. The family enjoys cooking meals and eating together, reading books, and playing learning games on a tablet. When asked how we could help support Laura and her family, she said she would like to see if there is anything we can do to help Richard possibly get services. She feels he is not talking as much as he should be,

and has difficulty holding conversations with others. When she tells him to do things, he often just stares at her and takes a while to do whatever it is she asked. We have been discussing this for a few months, and have been working on getting the paperwork signed and filled out. Laura was a little reluctant to have Richard screened at first, as this year was his first in any type of daycare or school setting. After building a relationship with Laura and talking with her more about how Richard is at home and at school, she has become willing to get him screened to see if services could help him. In order to help Laura overcome some of the barriers she faces in being involved in activities at school, she said, "It helps if I know far ahead when events are, so that I have time to find someone to come to the house to be with my parents." She also mentioned that she doesn't always know what types of things to do with Richard at home to help him, so a list of activities that would benefit him would be helpful.

The Brown Family

Ella is the mom of Sammy, a four-year-old in my morning class. Sammy also lives with his dad and two older siblings, who share their time between their mom and dad's house. Since Sammy started in my class in January, Ella has been very open and honest about some of Sammy's challenging behavior. He is a very active and busy child, who has some occupational and physical therapy needs that he has not yet received therapy for. His mother is willing to get him any help he may need; she just never knew the process of getting him services before he started school. Her goal is to get services started before he goes to Kindergarten next year, so that we can set him up to be successful in school. Ella is very worried about him, and mentioned that she was thinking about home schooling him because of some of his challenging behaviors. During our interview, Ella stated that they do not have a set routine at home. She gets Sammy up and ready for school at different times each day, and when he gets home, their activities change

often. The family often goes to other family members' houses, and Ella shared that Sammy loves anything electronic, including video games, playing on tablets or smartphones, and watching television or YouTube. She has a difficult time trying new activities at home with him, and finds it hard to keep his attention on one task for more than a few minutes. Ella expressed that she would be willing to come volunteer in the classroom and participate in school events, but finds it difficult because Sammy often won't leave her side when she is around in the classroom.

The Miller Family

The last parent that I interviewed was Shannon, the mother of three-year-old John. Shannon has two older daughters at home as well who are both in high school. Shannon works the evening shift at work during the week, so she is not home when John gets out of my afternoon class. Her daughters or other family members are the ones who pick him up from school and watch him at home. Because Shannon does not get home until after midnight, she stated, "It's hard for me to monitor what time John goes to bed because the girls are the ones that watch him, and they are not always good about getting him to bed on time." She also said John often sleeps until late in the day, until it is time to go to school at 1:00 PM, because he stays up so late. Shannon said when they do have time together, the family likes to cook and eat dinner together, and get together with other family members. John likes to play games and watch videos on his tablet, and loves to play basketball and do other outdoor activities. Shannon's work schedule is the biggest barrier to her being more involved with John, and she regrets not always getting his homework activities done because of it. She has been to a few parent events that occur right at drop-off time, because she has a few minutes before she goes to work. Shannon said the most helpful thing the school could do for her would be to offer full-day options for three-year-olds, so that she could make sure John would be involved in more educational

activities. Unfortunately, at this time, our center does not offer full-day options for three-year-olds.

Setting

The center that I conducted my research at is in the city of Rochester, New York. One hundred percent of the families our center serves are at or below the poverty level. Between all five centers in our organization, 68% of the children are African-American, 3% are white, 6% are biracial, and 23% are of another race or unspecified. These overall demographics are consistent with what I see at my center and in my classroom. The majority (83%) of the families we serve are also single parent families (“2013-2014 Annual Report,” n.d.). The center I work at is a Head Start location, serving low-income families. The primary goal of Head Start is to promote school readiness in children from birth to age five, but Head Start also includes health services, and works with families to promote overall family well-being (“Head Start Services | Office of Head Start | Administration for Children and Families,” n.d.). My center specifically works with families to set goals, works with parents to become their child’s teacher at home, and provides recommendations for health services and other needs the family may have, such as daycare or job assistance. We are very focused on working with the families of the children we serve, and not just on educating the students.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am currently working on a graduate degree in Literacy Birth-Grade 12. The 2015-2016 school year is my second year of teaching preschool, specifically Universal Pre-Kindergarten, a program run through New York State, and my first year working at a Head Start center.

As a 24-year-old Caucasian female, I have always known that I wanted to work with children, but never thought that preschool was where I would end up falling in love with

teaching. My love for this age group started while working at a suburban preschool summer camp, and continued when I began teaching preschool in the city. When I started working in the city, there seemed to be a perceived lack of parent involvement. Parents ask less often how their child is doing, very few parents show up to any events we have, and papers or activities we send home often go undone. However, the more time I spend working with my students and families, the more I am beginning to wonder if there is actually a lack of parent involvement, or are parents just involved in different ways than what I am used to? I want to find out what I, as a classroom teacher, can do to help support parents, what kinds of things the diverse families in my class do with their children, and help them to overcome any possible barriers they may have to being more involved in their child's education. I also wish to enhance my own understanding of cultural differences in order to counteract any unintentional biases I may bring to my teaching.

Data Collection

For this study, I primarily used interviews with parents or family members for data collection. I used a semi-structured interview that I created, which allowed me to follow the lead of the interviewee, and not strictly ask only the questions I had listed.

Data Analysis

Parent interviews were analyzed to develop an understanding of how the families are involved with their students, as well as barriers and challenges they may face. I hoped to learn how I could help the parents, either in becoming more involved, or in other ways. I looked across the answers to all of the interviews I conducted, to see if there were any trends in the data.

Procedures

I first talked with parents informally to set up a time that was convenient for them to do the interview. I then conducted the interviews with the parents or other family member. It was

important that the parents knew that I was conducting this research and the interviews in order to get to know their families better, and ultimately to help them. This was not an evaluation of their parenting, and I wanted the parents to know that they could be truthful with me, and not feel like their answers would be used against them. I then analyzed the data that I received from the interviews, and looked for trends in the data to see if there were similarities among the answers.

Trustworthiness

I conducted a qualitative study, utilizing one-on-one interviews with parents to collect my data. As a researcher, I wanted to make sure that I conducted my research in an ethical and valid way. My research was conducted over a four-week span. I utilized semi-structured interviews to collect data. While conducting my research, I kept an open mind and was engaged with the participants. While conducting the interviews, I made sure to clarify any additional questions I may have, to make sure that I understood the participants accurately.

Data Analysis

I interviewed participants over a four-week time frame, from February 2016 through March 2016. Using Clark and Creswell's (2015) bottom-up approach to qualitative research data analysis, I collected the data, transcribed the interviews, read through them, and began coding the data using open coding (Clark & Creswell, 2015). I did not have any codes in mind before I went through the interviews. I went through and created codes for the data. Some examples of the codes I created were routine (R) or no routine (NR), and codes for barriers, such as transportation (T), health (H) and work (W). I looked across all of the interviews and codes and built findings based on themes that I saw. I found that parents are involved in differing ways both at home and school, parents have barriers to being as involved as they would like in their child's education, and there are different ways I or my center can help parents in challenges they may face.

Findings

This section will discuss the results of my interviews. I separated the interview questions into three sections. The first section included questions that asked parents about the activities they do at home with their children. The second section was questions about barriers that they may face to being involved. The last section included questions about how I could help the parents overcome barriers.

Activities at Home

Daily Routines and Activities

Having a daily routine at home is important for young children. They will most likely have a daily routine once they start school, so having one at home at an early age sets allows them to become used to doing things in a certain order each day.

I asked each participant to describe their daily routine with their child, and activities that they do at home as a family. I wanted to find out activities that families do that I may not know about, so that I could try to connect home and school literacy. I also wanted to see which parents followed a routine with their child at home, and what activities are included in it. Of the seven interviews that I conducted, three of the participants, Kim, Lisa, and Laura, have a consistent daily routine with their child. They get their child up and ready around the same time each day, do similar activities daily, and have a set bedtime. The four parents who do not have a daily routine with their child do not have set wake up or bedtimes for their child. They do different activities with their child, but they change daily, and are not part of a set routine.

The participants I interviewed partake in differing activities with their children. Three parents said that they read with their child daily. Every parent mentioned that their child either watched television or played on a tablet every day, either before or after school. One parent,

Elaine, said that the majority of their day outside of school was spent watching cartoons or playing games on a family member's phone. She said they do not have a car, so they do not really go anywhere. Two parents, Shannon and Laura, both said that they enjoy cooking, and their child likes to help them any way they can. Elaine and Kim both said that they spend a lot of time at other family member's houses with their families.

Two parents, Shannon and Kim, both said that other people are often with their children at home because of their work schedules. Shannon said, "I don't have a lot of time to do anything with him, I work the B shift so I am not home when he gets home from school. His sisters have to watch him." This child's sisters are both in high school. Shannon said her daughters do the best they can, but working on school activities is not always the first thing on their mind.

For the most part, the responses I got from parents about activities they do at home were what I expected. When I talk with my students, they most often tell me that they like to play games on phones or tablets at home. A few children will say that they read books, or play with toys, but not many.

Based on the answers parents gave me, some parents consistently do educational activities with their children, while others do not. Since the children are in preschool, even having the children follow a consistent routine can be beneficial to them, as it is getting them ready to follow a routine in school. The parents who do follow a daily routine are also the ones who read books daily with their children, and take part in other activities.

Barriers Parents Face

An analysis of the data suggests that parents face different barriers to being involved with their child's education. During the interview, I asked parents about barriers they may face in being involved with activities at home and school with their child. Some of the barriers parents

mentioned were specific to their individual situations, and others were seen across multiple interviews.

Work Schedules

Some barriers create a conflict to being more involved at home. Shannon and Kim both work the afternoon/evening shift. Their children are in my afternoon class, so when the children get out of school, the parents are at work. They both ask other family members to do the activities we send home with the children, which they sometimes do, but also feel bad putting what they feel is their job off on others. Both Shannon and Kim expressed that it was difficult to work the second shift with a young child at home, but that it was even more difficult to find a job where they could work days.

Transportation

More often in the interviews, parents expressed barriers to being involved in activities at the school. Four parents, Lisa, Kim, Elaine, and Sharon, all said that transportation was the main reason they did not come to the school to events or to volunteer. Kim said, "We live on the other side of town, so driving back and forth that much in between work is a problem for me. Sometimes she is at her grandmas, but she has to walk her to school and has trouble walking back and forth that much." The other three parents do not have their own cars, so they are already walking to get their child to and from school. Most of our events are not right at the start or end of our day, which would mean an extra trip to and from school to get to events. In addition to this, Sharon and Lisa also have health issues that make it difficult to walk anywhere, especially back and forth to school more than the two times per day they already are doing.

How Can We Help

Transportation

One of the main goals of my research was to find out what I and the center can do to help parents with the challenges and barriers they may face in being involved in their child's education. Based on the interview answers, it seems that providing transportation would be helpful to at least four of the participants. That way, parents would not have to walk back and forth to the school so much, and could get their children to school more often. They could also come to more events or volunteer more, because there would be less trips to be made to the school.

Honoring Parent's Work Schedules

Another way the school could help would be to try and work school events around parents' work schedules. Lisa and Shannon both said it would be more convenient for them if the events were soon after school started, since they are already there dropping their children off. Some parents, such as Laura, just need a list of activities that she can do at home with her child.

My findings from my research were not exactly what I was expecting. I thought that I would gain a greater understanding of how I could use activities that families do at home to incorporate into my curriculum, but parents did not give me any activities that I did not already know about through conversations with their child, or with them previously. Most parents were more focused on ways we could help them, if there were ways, and barriers that they faced.

Discussion

Conclusions

Based on my findings, I can conclude that there are barriers that some parents face in being involved in their child's education, and there are also ways that my center and I can try and

help the parents overcome these barriers. Parents differ in the activities they do with their children at home, as well as the routines they have daily.

Implications

From my findings, there are two implications I have come up with. The first is that schools and teachers need to build relationships with parents, so that they feel comfortable sharing and talking with the teachers about different topics, including challenges they face, as well as how the school could build a stronger connection between home and school literacy. The second implication is that teachers and parents need to work together to try and limit any barriers they may face to being involved in their child's education.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to my study. The first was that I was limited in the number of responses I received to do the interviews with parents or guardians. I was only able to interview parents who were already at the center, so that I could talk to them in person about my research. This caused me to only be able to interview seven participants, all from my classroom and center.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on my findings, there are areas that I would recommend to be researched further. The first would be to interview more parents, including those from diverse backgrounds. I have five children in my classes whose parents and families are from other countries, but I was only able to interview one of the parents. If I were to move forward with my research, I would reach out to these parents more, and try to talk with them to see how we can better build the home-school connection, and bring their culture into our classroom.

My second recommendation would be to spend more time talking with parents about the barriers or difficulties they face to being involved in their child's education, and brainstorm realistic ideas that could be put into place. Looking at other research, and how other centers help their parents overcome challenges they face could be helpful in better serving the parents and families we work with.

Closing

The purpose of my research was to explore activities my families do at home, how parents are already involved in their child's education, and how my center and I could try and help parents overcome any challenges or barriers they may face in being involved in their child's education. Through interviewing parents and guardians, I learned more about the families and children that I work with, including challenges they face in being more involved than they already are with their child's education. With this new information, I hope to better serve my families for the remainder of this school year, and take what I learned with me to help parents in the coming years, as well as continue to build a stronger connection between the home and school communities.

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