Take-home Activities Influence on Parental Involvement

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**Abstract**

 Head Start is focused on a two generational approach to help increase developmental success though parental involvement in school programs. (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Ansari & Gershoff, 2016) In Prince Edward County, Cumberland County, and Nottaway County in Virginia, the Head Start program had a need to find new ways to get parents involved with their child/children’s education and learning. Many low-income families struggle to get involved in their child/children’s education compared to middle-class families. Head Start is geared for families in the lower income bracket and require a certain level of parental involvement from the families enrolled (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). The purpose of the study was to engage parental involvement by sending take-home activities with the child/children to see if there would be increased involvement. Mixed-methods evaluation research of quantitative and qualitative measures were used to evaluate the research by informing one another. The quantitative data was measured by evaluating themes from open-ended questions and quantitative data was measured by open-coding of the closed-ended questions from the survey. The responses from the survey produced three themes, fun, family togetherness, and learning new family skills and based on the quantitative data the take-home activities increased parent involvement. Based on the research if more take-home activities were created and sent home that would increase the involvement of the parents in their child/children’s educational learning.

**Introduction**

 Take-home activities can be fun while providing new ways for families enrolled at Head Start to gain more togetherness and positively contribute to the child/children’s developmental success. Parental involvement is a key component to Head Start and one challenge found was finding new ways to get parents more involved with their child/children’s educational learning. Duncan and Magnuson (2013) explained how children of low-income families are often not well prepared for starting grade school and keeping up with their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Head Start is focused on preparing children of low-income families by their two-generational approach, getting parents involved in all aspects of the educational process (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

There was a Head Start Impact Study (2013) that examined how Head Start impacts children and families that enrolled in their program from pre-school to third-grade and found that Head Start programs positively influenced child literacy and language development. Ansari and Gershoff examined how parental involvement influenced positive improvement in parental behaviors at home. There was a gap in the literature with minimal research on pre-school age children.

The purpose of this evaluation research was to see how take-home activities affect parental involvement at Head Start in three Virginia counties Prince Edward County, Cumberland County, and Nottoway County, with 86 families with children three to five years of age. An issue with this evaluation research was that there was not enough time for pre-tests and post-tests which would have allowed for more data to be found and to see lasting impacts of the results from this study. Another issue was the sample size that was tested in a small percentage of the Head Start programs that exist. Based on the research an increase in parent involvement positively correlated with the take-home activities, and therefore to improve the parental involvement there should be more take-home activities. Administrators and parents could create more take-home activities for future improvements in parental involvement.

**Literature Review**

The Head Start program is an educational strategy implemented in early childhood for better developmental success and home life by having parents be involved with their children’s education (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Instituted in the 1960s, Head Start is a two-generational approach created to increase child developmental success through parental involvement in their children’s schooling (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004). The two generational approach has focused on including parents in school programs of their children (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). This is implemented as a supportive system by being involved in a wide array of school activities, such as, volunteering in the classroom and taking what was learned at school and engaging children at home (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). Arnold, Zelio, Doctoroff, and Ortiz’s (2008) article, also expressed that parent involvement increases academic success by looking at multiple studies of different school aged children from kindergarten to twelfth grade. There are fewer studies done to reflect earlier childhood development, the many studies done on other age groups shows a common theme between parent involvement and child success (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001).

**Parent Involvement**

 Parent involvement within Head Start has been described as having parents participate in school activities and have better communication with the teachers (Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) found that parental involvement is not enough, parents must be engaged in what their children are learning. It’s not enough to just show up and do the activities, parents should engage fully to be able to promote success for their child. Ansari and Gershoff (2016) had found that parent involvement in the classroom allowed the parents to reproduce what they see the children learning in school and bring it home, and that engagement can have indirect links to changes in parental behavior. Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) had also found that parent involvement provided stronger connections between class and home life, this creates consistency. Castro et al. (2004) found that parent involvement correlated with stronger improvement in “cognitive, language, and socio-emotional domains” (p.414).

**Barriers to parental involvement**

Smokowski et al. (2018) had studied barriers to parental involvement as “structural, attitudinal, and interpersonal” (p.2932). Lamb-Parker et al. (2001) described life experiences as barriers to parental involvement and had sent surveys home to find out what types of things make it hard for parents to be involved while at Head Start. Castro et al. (2004) found that the individual characteristics of both parents and teachers could affect parent involvement. Ansari and Gershoff (2016) stated parents may not know how parent involvement can help their children and, that by spending time with their children doing activities geared toward children increases positive academic success. In some cases, it had been found that parents that do not engage their children at home reflected their own experiences of education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014)

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Methods**

 Ansari and Gershoff (2016) tested their theory that parental involvement helps achieve development success, by doing a longitudinal study to make predictions on future developmental gains. A strength to the testing parental involvement and developmental success was having staff evaluate parent’s involvement against different areas of participation to measure involvement (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). The large samples of parents measured and uses of a wide variety of sources was a great strength in studying parental involvement, and highlighted gaps in the research (Castro et al., 2004). Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, and Ortiz (2008) had pointed out that studies on parental involvement, majority of the samples tested were mothers, leaving a large population, fathers, out of the studies. Another weakness identified had been varying definitions of parental involvement, which made it hard to measure data from multiple studies (Castro et al., 2004).

 Most studies on parental involvement found that there was a correlation between active involvement and positive child developmental success (Castro et al, 2004; Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Arnold et al., 2013). Head Start is the first and most recognized program that focused on the two-generation model, which led many researchers to study parental involvement and positive developmental gains (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Arnold et al. (2008) found that there needs to be more studies on different predictors of parent involvement in children as they develop out of early childhood but found that involvement helped facilitate better relationships between the students and teachers creating longer lasting gains.

**Methods and Data**

**Study Design and Sample**

In this study, we worked with families with children in the Head Start program. We focused on 86 families enrolled in Head Start in three rural Virginia counties. Each family had three to five-year-old children in the program. The focus of this evaluation research was to measure parent involvement and developmental success of the child/children through the five take-home activities, “Thankful Turkey Activity, Animal Dice Activity, Noodle Necklace Activity, Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and the Sugar Writing Activity”. Each of the 86 families received a different take-home activity every day for five days, followed by a pen and paper survey. The overall response rate was 52%.

**Procedure**

In adherence to IRB and Longwood University’s research ethics, each pen and paper survey had a box to be checked stating an understanding of the survey directions and consent for participation. A $5 gift card to Walmart was attached to each survey, as an incentive for parent completion and return with the child/children to school. The surveys sent back with the children were collected by the teachers.

**Quantitative Measurements**

To assess parent involvement four of the following questions were asked: “How well did your family enjoy this activity? How effective was this activity in helping your family discuss emotions? How involved was your family in this activity? How much assistance did your child/children require for this activity?” The responses were measured on a 10-point scale (0 = not at all to 10 = very much). These close ended questions were specific to each of the five take home activities. When comparing the bivariate data question 16, “How much assistance did your child/children require for this activity?” the responses were re-coded in order to have both categorical and continuous variables.

**Qualitative Measurements**

The survey started with open-ended questions in order to lower the chance of survey fatigue. Among some of our questions: “The Family Fun Time Activities included a Thankful Turkey Activity, an Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar Tray Writing Activity. ***What was your favorite activity and why*?** Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future? Do you think that being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time you got to spend with your family after school? Please explain. If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?”

**Analysis**

**Quantitative responses.**

The descriptive analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 25 (SPSS 25) to examine the survey responses.

**Qualitative responses.**

 All the open-ended responses were transcribed and then a qualitative coding was used based on themes of responses.

 **Mixed method analysis.**

 We used mixed methods evaluation research of qualitative and quantitative measures to inform one another.

**Quantitative Findings**

Based on the responses received from the families with children at Head Start in three rural Virginia counties, Prince Edward County, Cumberland County, and Nottoway County. There were 86 surveys sent home to the families and there was a 40% return rate. The input from the respondents presented that sending activities home increased parent involvement.

 Each activity gave the parents the opportunity for increased involved. Results from close-ended questions about the effectiveness of assisting in the activities provided on a continuous scale (0-10), zero meaning not at all and ten being very much. Shown in the Table 1:

Table 1

*Effectiveness of the activity in helping to get the whole family involved*

Involvement Count Percentage

0 1 2.9%

5 2 5.9%

6 4 11.8%

7 1 2.9%

8 5 14.7%

9 3 8.8%

10 18 52.9%

The involvement that was induced by the take-home activities was calculated with a mean of 7.31 and a median of 8 out of a scale (0-10).

In comparing the relationship between the activities and parent involvement the results of the responses from the survey indicated that the activities were positively correlated to parent involvement. In Table 2, the activities that got the parents involved were recoded into three categories, 1 not at all, 2 moderately, 3 very much. When activities were compared to the parent involvement the data demonstrated in Table 2 showed the increase in involvement.

Table 2

*The Effect of Take-home Activities on Parent Involvement*

Activities Involvement Standard Deviation

No assistance 0

Moderate assistance 5.86 .69

Much assistance 9.50 .81

The purpose of sending take-home activities with the children of Head Start was to see if they would improve parent involvement. Based on the results received and shown in Table 2 the take-home activities were able to increase parent involvement.

**Qualitative Findings**

Through coding there were three themes found from the surveys collected: fun, family togetherness, and the learning new family skills. The activities sent home were focused on parent involvement at Head Start in Prince Edward County, Cumberland County, and Nottaway County in Virginia. The surveys sent home gave parents the opportunity to voice what activity was the favorite, what was gained from the take-home activities, if the take-home activities help to increase togetherness, and if there was anything they would like to change. For Respondent 5 the activities made it easier to for them to do it because they were take-home activities from school but found they enjoyed the activities and the together time, “Yes I do. Say it was homework made us mindful we had to do it but we found later it was fun and we looked forward to it.” This is just one of the responses received that shows that the take-home activities increased their involvement by giving fun activities that brought them together and were able to learn new skills.

Fun was often highlighted for many families while doing the activities. When asked what could be changed for future activities and what was gained from the activities Respondent 13 wrote, “Nothing. It was really fun.” Many other respondents expressed that their family had fun with different activities. Respondent 8 wrote, “Our favorite activity was the dice because had fun doing the different animals”. Different families had fun with different aspects of the activities for various reasons. Some only felt homework time and activities are reserved for the older kids, such as, Respondent 19, “I think it increased the amount of fun-time because usually only the older kids get help with homework [and] get to do activities.” Other respondents expressed the fun the family had seeing what their child/children knew, like, Respondent 18, “The animal dice activity was very fun, it was interesting for me to see all the animals he identified.”

It sometimes can be hard to map out specific time for family togetherness during the week because it can get so busy. Some of the respondents voiced how the take-home activities made a way for some togetherness, such as Respondent 11, “it was something we made time for we don’t always get that chance”. Respondent 13 also stated they were able to gain more family togetherness, but the activities also inspired them to find more things to do together, “We were together doing these activities: my brother, me, and my son. We don’t usually do these kinds of things together. I want to continue doing things together.” In some cases, the take-home activities encouraged families to look up new ways to do things together, like Respondent 8 that stated, “It had us spend more time together by looking up more things to do as a family”.

The take-home activities gave the families the opportunity to learn new family skills and new ways of being involved by giving pre-planned activities. Respondent 6 noted their happiness with the sugar tray because they stated, “The sugar tray was my favorite because it helped [my child] writing her name”. Respondent 6 also said they would like more activities like this to help with writing skills by stating, “I would like more activities about learning to write and how to hold a pencil correctly.” For this family the activities helped the parent with a new teaching tool and made them interested in learning more. Many of the respondents wrote that the activities helped them learn new ways to work together by following directions like Respondent 15, “We all gained experience in following directions and working together.” Respondent 18 stated, “The animal dice activity was very fun, it was interesting for me to see all the animals he identified.” In this case the parent was able to see the skills their child had learned and to learn skills themselves for working with their child.

Based on the parent responses to the survey, the take-home activities were seen as positives by the families. They gave opportunity to the families to gain new ways of having family together time while having fun and learning skills. Some of the skills learned were how activities can make learning fun and bring them together.

**Conclusion**

 This evaluation research was to inform whether providing families of the children at Head Start in three Virginia counties, Prince Edward County, Cumberland County, and Nottoway County with take-home activities would increase parental involvement. Head Start focuses on a two-generational approach to children’s education, and the research carried out engaged that model to get increase parent involvement. (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004) The results indicated that was a positive correlation between the take-home activities and getting parents involved in their child/children’s education. It was also noted in the responses received, the participants gained new family skills through having fun together while participating in the activities. Through the evaluation research conducted Head Start gained new ideas of getting parents involved.

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