Encouraging Parental Involvement at Head Start

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**Abstract**

This is a study of parental involvement in three locations of Head Start for parents with children three to five years old. Head Start was created as a federally funded national preschool program in 1965 (Deming, 2009). In this study, activities designed to promote parental involvement were sent home five days for one week. The activities were given to the children at Head Start and taken home by the children. At the end of the week a survey was sent home with the children. The purpose of the survey was to record results of how the activities went according to the families that did them. To give incentive for the families to fill out the survey a gift card was attached to the survey. The survey’s goal is to answer the question of if parental involvement increased due to the activities. In the survey multiple types of questions were used to understand how the activities promoted parental involvement or involvement in general within the family. This study is important because it is evaluation research for the amount of parental involvement in typically low-income households that have children in the Head Start program. From the survey, it can be determined, that in the quantitative analysis there is no difference in the amount of people participating in the activity and the enjoyment a child gets out of the activity. From the qualitative analysis, it is apparent that the families were more together from the activities while completing the activity.

**Introduction**

In this study of parental involvement, the parents of children between the ages three and five in Head Start programs in three rural Virginia counties were studied. The parental involvement of parents with children in the Head Start program were studied because Head Start, as a program, demands for parents to participate as much as possible in the program in every way from policy making to implementation (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001). The focus of the study is the if the activities sent home to the families will increase parental involvement. Parental involvement is extremely important in the development of children because it is linked to children’s success or failure in school or things associated with school (Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012).

For the study Family Fun Activities were sent home with the children age three to five in Head Start for them to voluntarily do. The activities sent home included a Thankful Turkey Activity, an Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar Tray Writing Activity The purpose of the Family Fun Time Activities was to increase the amount of parental involvement in the family. To measure the amount of parental involvement a survey was created that asks the family to evaluate how the activities affected their family and what they got out of the activities. The survey was sent home along with the last activity with a gift card attached to it as an incentive to try and increase the response rate.

**Literature Review**

**Parental Involvement Defined**

Parental involvement is how the parent interacts and encourages their child in what they are doing. A widely known model of parental involvement is the Epstein model (Bower, & Griffin, 2011). In the Epstein model the six different types of parental involvement: positive home conditions, communication, involvement at school, home learning activities, shared decision making within the school, and community partnerships (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009). This model is widely used and supported because it recognizes the role of parents in a home such as supporting educational efforts and creating a positive environment for those efforts (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Other researchers used other definitions including: Parental involvement includes the parents being there emotionally, physically, and monetarily.

**Importance of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is important because it is linked to children’s success or failure in school or things associated with school (Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012). Studies have proven that children with more involved parents are more likely to have higher grades, pass class, get promoted, go to school, graduate on time, and go on to college (US Department of Education, 2004). Parental involvement influences children in a good way for both school and the rest of their lives. Parental involvement can effect many different subjects for children including math, parental involvement can start to positively impact children’s mathematic skills as soon as the end of first grade (Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012).

**Difficulties of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement can be evident in many ways such as attendance at sporting events, helping the children study or work on homework, volunteering at the school their child attends, and so much more. But some of these are things that are just too much for some parents who have full time jobs or other commitments to do. There is a constant struggle for parents balancing everything on their plate. Volunteering for example can have parents having to supply more things that they may not be able to afford (Bower, & Griffin, 2011). Another good example is the time constraint of sports events because it can take time away from doing things that are necessary in a household. With all of these limitations put on what a parent can and can’t do for their child more and more people seem uninvolved in their children’s lives (Bower, & Griffin, 2011).

**Head Start**

With parental involvement on a decline in society, the program Head Start was founded. Head Start was founded in 1965 during the “War on Poverty.” Head Start was created as a federally funded national preschool program (Deming, 2009). Head Start as a program demands for parents to participate as much as possible in the program in every way from policy making to implementation (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001). This forces parents to be involved in the program and therefore their child/children’s lives. An important goal of the Head Start program is to increase parental involvement since the level of parental involvement varied so much (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001).

**Data and Method**

**Study Design and Sample**

To study parental involvement in children’s lives, a group college students and professors studied children and families at the Head Start program. Those at the Head Start program are families with low income the children involved in the study are between the ages of three and five years old. The population used in the study is from families of children enrolled in Head Start and that are between three and five years old. The sample is families of Head Start programs in three rural Southern Virginia Counties. The study is done using evaluation research. The sample size for this study is 86 families, and the compliance rate of the survey is 35.

**Procedure**

The study activities were sent home with the children every day for one week. The activities included a turkey plate activity, animal dice activity, noodle necklace activity, stress ball balloon activity, and a sugar writing tray activity. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, also known as IRB. At the end of the week, with the last activity, a survey was sent home with a five-dollar gift card attached as incentive to fill out and return the survey. The survey and activities were given to the children by their Head Start teachers to take home. The survey is done with pen and paper. After completing the survey, it should be sent back with the children to Head Start to be collected by the teachers and given to the researchers.

**Quantitative Measures**

The quantitative measures of the survey are the close ended questions. One of the close ended questions that best measures parental involvement is *Did anyone else living in your household participate in any of the activities? Yes or No* and the contingency question is *If yes, please write the number of people who participated in the blank net to each activity.* This allows participants to examine more of the family’s involvement rather than just parental involvement. Another variable of the study is the child’s enjoyment in the activity. A close ended question that relates to this variable is *On a scale from 1-5, how much did your child/children enjoy each activity? (1-Not at all, 5-Very much).* This question allows the researcher to know if the child is enjoying themselves in the activities.

**Qualitative Measures**

The qualitative measures of the survey are the open-ended questions and the independent variables of the study. The open-ended questions from our survey include: *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?* These questions help the researchers examine the levels of parental involvement by seeing if one of the activities allowed for more parental involvement than others and seeing how the activities affected the families in the short term.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The survey response data was analyzed using SPSS the 25th edition. Descriptive statistics were recorded. With the SPSS program two variables were analyzed separately then analyzed together to be compared.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The open-ended questions on the survey were used to explore the themes of Parental Involvement. The themes correlated to parental involvement and those affecting parental involvement.

**Mixed Method**

In this research study a mixed method of analysis was used to determine if the activities sent home were successful in promoting and getting parents more involved in their children’s’ lives. The mixed method is the usage of both qualitative and quantitative analysis to determine the success of the activities.

**Quantitative Data**

From the surveys gathered from three Head Starts in rural counties the independent variable is the number of people involved in sugar writing activity. To answer the question of family members involved in the activity the person who completed the survey had to write down the number for how many participants were involved in the activity in their home. The sugar writing activity was chosen to be analyzed to narrow the examination and make the analysis more direct towards one activity. The average number reported of how many family members were involved in the sugar writing activity is about three family members. In Table 1 the most common answer is two family members. The percentage of respondents who answered with two family members was 33.3% of the 21 respondents who answered this question.

The dependent variable is the amount of enjoyment the child or children had in the Sugar Writing Activity. In the survey, respondents had to answer by writing a number between one and five to rate their enjoyment. A one meant the least amount of fun while a five meant the most amount of fun. The only responses gathered were either four or five. The most frequent answer respondents wrote was five with 29 responses. The average answer between all 34 respondents was 4.85. In Table 2, 85.3% of the respondents selected five as their level of enjoyment. This shows that all respondents enjoyed the activity, and most rated the enjoyment to five which is equal to very much as said in the question.

When the independent and dependent variables are compared together using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. In this bivariate analysis of the data collected in the survey, the average of child enjoyment on a scale from 1 to 5 is separated based on how many family members participated in the sugar writing activity. In Table 3 the data is organized showing the differences in the average of enjoyment the child experienced dependent on the number of family members that participated in the sugar writing activity with the child.

From Table 3 it is clear that there is not much difference in enjoyment the child or children experience from how many family members participated in the sugar writing activity. With the average of enjoyment in each row being no more than 0.25 away from each other and all in the range of 4.75 and 5 it is clear that all the participating children enjoyed the activity no matter how many family members also participated. There is no pattern of increased or decreased enjoyment as the number of family members changes.

Table 1

*Number of family members involved in the sugar writing activity*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Number of Family Members  who participated | Frequency | Percentage with this answer |
| 1 family member | 3 | 14.3 |
| 2 family members | 7 | 33.3 |
| 3 family members | 4 | 19.0 |
| 4 family members | 3 | 14.3 |
| 5 family members | 4 | 19.0 |
| Total | 21 | 100 |

*Note:* 21 respondents answered this question. This is the independent variable.

Table 2

*Child Enjoyment on a Scale of 1-5 in the Sugar Writing Activity*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Level of Enjoyment | Frequency | Percentage with this answer |
| 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 5 | 14.7 |
| 5 | 29 | 85.3 |
| Total | 34 | 100 |

*Note:* 34 respondents answered this question. This is dependent variable.

Table 3

*Comparison of number of family members involved and child enjoyment*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of Family Members involved  in Sugar Writing Activity | Mean of Child Enjoyment |
| 1 | 5 |
| 2 | 4.86 |
| 3 | 4.75 |
| 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 4.75 |
| Total | 4.86 |

*Note:* Only 21 answers are used because of the difference in number of those who answered the two questions.

**Qualitative Data**

To answer the question of if the specific activities sent home to families of three to five years enrolled in the head start program in three rural counties in Virginia the themes of the qualitative responses vary from question to question. Each question had a variety of themes represented.

In the respondents’ surveys when asked about what they got from their favorite activity out of the five sent home there was a reoccurring theme of togetherness a subtheme of this was having the activity lead to a continuation of doing similar activities. An example of this subtheme is when Respondent 8 said “It had us spend more time together by looking up more things to do as a family.” This clearly relates to the theme and subtheme. Respondent 13 said “We were 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. My son was happy, and it was fun.” These answers to the question, *Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future*, show that the respondents family gained time together and a desire to continue doing activities.

When respondents were asked *Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?*, a reoccurring theme was that the participants learned something. Respondent 1 said “We learn[ed] to do teamwork.” Respondent 4 answered with “She learn[ed] to take turns.” Both responses showed that those who participated in the activity learned a new skill and got something out of the activity.

In the respondents’ survey responses to the question *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.*, had two responses either yes or no. Those that said no explained it was because they always found time to spend with their family. However those that responded yes had three reoccurring themes in their explanations it increased the amount of time because it was already prepared, they were excited for the next activity they would have to do, and it forced their family to spend time together. Respondent 4 said “Yes it took less time to prepare the activity more time to play.” Respondent 10 answered by saying “Yes, because been a busy mom of two it’s hard to come home and try to think of something to do.” This response showed that the factor of the activity being pre-planned for them increased the time they had for family fun time. Several of the responses that showed that the families were excited to complete the activity. These responses include Respondent 5’s answer “Yes, I do. Say it was homework made us mindful we had to do it, but we later found it was fun and looked forward to it,” as well as Respondent 18’s reply to the question stating “Yes, everyone wanted to participate and help” showed that people were actually excited for the activities and wanted to do them. Another reoccurring theme in response to the third free response question on the surveys sent home was that the preplanned activities allowed the family to spend time together. Respondents 11 and 19 were two who explained that it allowed the family to be together. Respondent 11 answered saying “Yes, it was something that we made time for we don’t always get that chance” and Respondent 19 said “Yes, I think it increased the mount of fun time because usually only the older kids get help with homework and get to do activities.” These responses clearly represent the theme of allowing the family to have time together.

The final free response question on the survey sent home was *If you could change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?* The majority of the respondents said nothing. However, a select few mention two different things they wished to be changed including the materials used and the objective of the activities. Respondent 3 said “Make the funnel tip just a smidge bigger so the rice goes into the balloon a little better.” Respondent 5 gave feed back on the weight of the materials for the animal dice activity stating, “Something not as heavy for the animal dice.” Another respondent, Respondent 5, even mentioned that their child and other children their child’s age like to put things in their mouths and that materials should be decided with that in mind. Respondent 6 gave feed back explaining that they would prefer different objectives, “I like each activity, I would like more activities about learning to write and how to hold a pencil correctly.”

Throughout the free response questions themes can be seen in the answers to each question such as togetherness, learning, less time for preparing the activity, excitement for the activity, allowed family to be together, a change in the materials, and a change in the objectives of the activities. Throughout the entire qualitative responses, the largest theme was togetherness because it was talked about in nearly all the responses and it contributed to how well the activity went and was liked. Parental Involvement is directly related to family togetherness because in order for parents to be involved in their children’s lives they must have time to be together and do things together.

**Conclusion**

The study of parental involvement of parents with children between the ages of three and five in the Head Start program involved sending activities home everyday for one week with the children to voluntarily do with their family. The Family Fun Time Activities sent home with the children included a Thankful Turkey Activity, an Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar Tray Writing Activity. The purpose of the Family Fun Time Activities was to increase the amount of parental involvement in the family. To measure the amount of parental involvement a survey was created that asks the family to evaluate how the activities affected their family and what they got out of the activities. The survey was sent home along with the last activity with a gift card attached to it as an incentive to try and increase the response rate.

From the survey that was sent home, it was evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative analysis. From the quantitative analysis, the compared data was the amount of family members involved in the sugar writing activity and the enjoyment of the child during the sugar writing activity. This comparison showed that the number of family members didn’t change the child’s enjoyment as all of the responses were either four or five on a scale from one to five From the qualitative analysis, the overall theme the responses gave was the increase of togetherness they got from the activities. The Family Fun Time Activities were able to bring the family together more, and the children enjoyed doing them without consideration to how many of their family members participated in the activity with them.

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