**Parental Involvement: How Parental Involvement Stimulates or Encourages Children’s Learning**

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**Abstract**

A survey was sent home to 51 guardians of children at Head Start learning academy in relation to several activities that were sent home with their children from the Head Start Learning Academy, these surveys were analyzing the several smart objectives that corresponded with the different activities. Eleven of those surveys were returned back and analyzed through descriptive statistics, the independent variable was measured through the question asking, “How often do you interact with the teachers at head start.?” The dependent variable was asked through the question “Did this activity increase the amount that you talked/interacted with your child?” The activity in question was the send-home activity “Painted Leaf Press.” It was found that most parents talked or interacted with their child’s teacher as Head Start on a daily or weekly basis, and the send home activities mostly increased the amount of conversation that parents had with their children while at home. These questions were asked in relation the overall learning and stimulation for a child in their schooling with the amount of parental interaction that is happening at home.

**Introduction**

 A group of 40 college students conducted a research evaluation on the effects of parental involvement on overall child success in their academic careers. Students conducted send-home activities for children of Head Start to complete throughout an extended period of time. Following these activities students sent home a survey for the guardian of the children to fill out in relation to the multitude of send-home activities. Questions asked ranged from overall success at completing the activities, to the demographic of the household in which these children experience in their at home lives. Fifty-one surveys were sent home, within the following weeks eleven of those surveys were returned to the teachers of the Head Start program. These surveys were then examined through descriptive statistics in order to have a better understanding of the correlation between parental involvement and child engagement.

 How can parental involvement stimulate or encourage children's learning? This is the question that is trying to be answered through the entire research evaluation. How can a child’s at-home parental involvement be beneficial in the child’s success in their academic work, this is measured through the responses that were received back from the guardians of the Head Start children. When examining the responses in order to find a correlation between the parental involvement and the encouragement of children’s learning, it is important to consider that these responses are a small sample of the Prince Edward County population.

Before beginning the process of evaluating the responses in order to present evidence regarding the relation between parental involvement and the encouragement of children’s success in their academics it is hypothesized that if families are engaging in the take home assignments, then it is expected that the children's learning will improve in the long run. If families are engaging in the fun take home activities, then it is expected that families will be more involved in the child's learning. This gives an understanding in to what is trying to be researched throughout the evaluation.

**Literature Review**

**Parental Involvement in Child Success**

Parental involvement, defined as the participation of parents in regular two-way learning or communication circulating around academic learning as well as other school activities, aids in having a better understanding about what our research will be pertaining to (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parents, being one of the largest stakeholders in the school community, have a great responsibility in keeping the work ethic of young children going even when outside of school or the classroom (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Understanding that this task is difficult for some families around different communities is key to understanding the research that is being presented within our writing. Strengthening the overall parental involvement in childhood education is one of the ways that parents can be beneficial in the overall success of childhood education, in addition another way that parental involvement can be reinforced is a positive relationship between the school and parents, such as holding open houses, parent teachers’ conferences, etc. (Driessen, Smit, Sleggers, 2005). In the community it is important to understand that many different families do not have access to the tools to be able to be classified as an involved parent, this depends on many different circumstances such as minority status as well as socioeconomic background. Research shows that there are two different types of parental involvement, one being parent-initiated involvement, the second being school initiated involvement such as send home activities (Smit, 1999).

 Traditional parental involvement stems from a strong relationship not only with the parent and child but also with the parent or family with the school in which the child attends (Okeke, 2014). This strong relationship has shown reinforcement of parental involvement shown in many different studies revolving around the benefits of parental involvement. Benefits of parental involvement include better understanding of school topics, increased comprehension of material, enhanced level of academic success, and an overall positive relationship with school faculty. (Driessin, Smit, Sluggers, 2005). On the opposite side of the situation there are many different families that do not have the time or supplies to be as involved with their children's schoolwork as much as they would like to be. There are many different academic setbacks that can be apparent in children that are not actively engaging in school activities, or that are not having parental involvement that is necessary in succeeding in academics (Chang, Park, Singh, Sung, 2009). The effects of limited parental involvement in many different communities that are low income/socioeconomic status as well as communities with many different ethnic backgrounds are becoming more clear in terms of lower access to vital materials in order to succeed in their learning experience (Chang, Park, Singh, Sung, 2009). There have been many different studies that have been going on which mention the idea of strengthening the overall parental involvement amounts throughout many different communities. The benefits of parental involvement strongly outweigh any other conditions that are presented against the idea of parents being involved in a children's education through: Higher grades, more social interaction throughout classes, greater developmental growth, and increased satisfaction within parents idea of success. (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsy, Sandler, 2007). Pairing along with the study involving parental involvement and how much it happens in any given community, there has been an article published regarding methods to strengthen parental involvement. Many of these readings involve ways such as the school providing materials for parents to use while at home (Okeke, 2014). Enhancing parental involvement is very difficult because many students have different lives at home, many parents are too busy to be able to have that active involvement, many families are simply too large to be able to always have one on one involvement with their children (Sapungan G & Sapungan R, 2014).

**Data and Methods**

A survey questionnaire was created by the 40 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University. The survey contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Items on the survey were designed to evaluate SMART objectives of each of five activities that were completed the previous week by Head Start families. Beyond the objectives of the activities, participants were asked about their experiences with Head Start, take home activities, and demographic information about their households.

The non-probability sample for this study was based on the 51 children (ages three to five) who attend Head Start in two rural counties in Virginia. After activities were sent home with children for five days, the questionnaire was sent home with all 51 students. Attached to the questionnaire was a children’s book, to incentivize families to return the survey. Guardians of the children were asked to complete the survey and return it to the Head Start teacher the following school day. Eleven questionnaires were returned the next school day. Teachers then sent a reminder home with children to return any outstanding questionnaires. This resulted in zero more questionnaires being returned. Overall, there was a 22% response rate.

Quantitative analysis of the returned surveys is based on the close-ended questions. For this study the dependent variable is the involvement or stimulation of parental involvement. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was “Did this activity increase the amount of time that you talked with your child?” The answer choices for this item were: yes, no, and unsure. The independent variable for this study is overall academic success of children working with Head Start. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was “How often do you communicate with child's teachers at Head Start?” The answer choices for this question were: daily or more, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, and never. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys is based on the open-ended questions. The open-ended questions on the survey were: “What did your family enjoy most about these activities?” “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?” Lastly, “What are your favorite ways to spend time with your child?” The responses given were written out into three different themes, where these themes were drawn out from the respondents in order to draw a conclusion about these send home activities.

**Findings**

**Quantitative Analysis**

For the quantitative findings the following variables were examined through descriptive statistics using R-Studio. The independent variable, which examined the number of times that parents of Head Start children communicated with their respective child’s respective teacher at Head Start, this variable served as the independent variable. The dependent variable, which examined if the painted leaf press sends home activity for children at Head Start increased the amount of time that parents talked/engaged with their child, this variable served as the dependent variable for the study.

The independent variable for this study investigated how often the parents interacted with the teachers at Head Start. The descriptive statistics showed that out of 11 parents who participated in this survey, five of those parents communicated with their children's teachers at Head Start on a daily basis or more. With the remaining six parents, five more expressed that they communicate with the teachers on a weekly basis. With the remaining one parent, they expressed that they communicate with the teacher monthly. This data is shown below in *Figure One.*

*Figure One.*

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 The dependent variable for this study was the variable that measured the amount that the parent talked/interacted with their child throughout the painted leaf press send home activity. The descriptive statistics found that out of eleven parents that participated in the survey, eight of the parents recorded that they talked/interacted with their child more throughout the activity than they would on a normal basis. Out of the remaining three parents, one recorded that they did not talk or interact with their child anymore, and two of the respondents did not answer the question at all. The data is shown below in Figure *Two.*

*Figure Two.*

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 When comparing the independent and dependent variables together it is clear to see that the more that the parent interacts with the teachers of Head Start, the more the parent has interaction/conversation with their child at home. This makes sense as it shows that the more the parent does either one of these variables, the more the parent cares about the growth and education of their child in a guided curriculum sense. Referring back to the literature review, this data supports the claims that are made throughout. The literature review shows that within the idea of parental involvement, those that show more interaction with teachers are more supportive and active with their child's learning. It is also important to note that out of the eleven surveys returned back there is almost a one hundred percent rate of interacting with their child more within the send home activities.

**Qualitative Analysis**

 Eleven surveys were turned back into the Head Start program, with three different open-ended questions. These open-ended questions were coded, after these questions were coded there were three different themes that made themselves apparent throughout the eleven surveys that were returned. The first theme that was found was interaction and engagement, the second theme was quality time, and the third theme was resourcefulness. The theme of interaction and engagement appeared six different times between the three questions. Quality time appeared a number of seven times between the three questions throughout eleven surveys. Lastly, resourcefulness appeared five different times throughout the survey open ended questions.

The theme of interaction and family time appeared six times throughout the survey open ended questions. For example, respondent two expressed that these activities were “very engaging.” The respondent expressed this opinion when asked if there was any way that they would have improved the send home activities for their children. This answer shows and exemplifies the theme of interaction/engagement by referring to these activities as such. Respondent six stated “Involve the whole family more.” This quote from respondent six is expressing that they wish the activities would involve the entire family more, this shows that one of the major themes throughout these activities were interaction and engagement. It shows this because, while they are requesting more, it is setting up the principle that this is a theme that should have been covered to their parents' liking.

Theme number two appeared a number of seven times throughout the surveys that were returned back to Head Start. Respondent four responded to the question with “It brought a lot of fun and laughter for our family.” This quote shows that family time is something that means a lot to them, it also expresses how these activities set up a great amount of quality time making this a common theme throughout. When asked what their favorite part about the activities were, respondent three said “The family time we spent together.” This quote helps further establish that quality time is a common theme because it is something that many respondents have stated as their favorite thing about the send home activities.

The final theme appeared five different times throughout the survey. When looking at the theme of resourcefulness respondent 2 expressed that their favorite part was “learning new things.” This sets up a theme that these send home activities are resourceful for the children that are participating, resourcefulness appears multiple more times throughout the entire survey. Respondent four stated “I loved the organization, detailed instruction, and materials being included.” This quote shows that these send home activities were a great resource for the parents to utilize in order to be more productive and interactive within their children's education.

After examining the three themes of interaction and engagement, quality time, and resourcefulness, it is important to note that these three themes are essential in making these send home activities and research worth the effort. These themes appeared many different times throughout the open-ended response questions proving that there is a significance in their role with this experiment. Interaction and engagement appeared six times, quality time appeared six times, and resourcefulness appeared five different times. The eleven respondents were very to the point in their mention of these three themes, showing that there was thought behind the meaning of the themes retrieved from the surveys.

**Conclusion**

The benefits of parental involvement strongly outweigh any other conditions that are presented against the idea of parents being involved in a children's education through: Higher grades, more social interaction throughout classes, greater developmental growth, and increased satisfaction within parents' idea of success. (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsy, Sandler, 2007). Pairing along with the study involving parental involvement and how much it happens in any given community, there has been an article published regarding methods to strengthen parental involvement. Many of these readings involve ways such as the school providing materials for parents to use while at home (Okeke, 2014). Enhancing parental involvement is very difficult because many students have different lives at home, many parents are too busy to be able to have that active involvement, many families are simply too large to be able to always have one on one involvement with their children (Sapungan G & Sapungan R, 2014).

The findings of the research presented allow the researchers to make a connection to the overall achievement and success of a child's academics to the parental involvement that the children receive outside of school. This is concluded through the eleven surveys that were received back from the guardians of the children at the Head Start program. Through examining the independent and dependent variables using descriptive statistics it is found that the send-home activities that most parents found they engaged with their children more throughout the activities. It is also found that most of the parents interact with the teachers of head start on a daily or weekly basis, which will overall increase the success of their child in their academic’s.

Throughout the research there were many limitations that were keeping the researchers from achieving a higher response rate in the surveys that were sent home. Some of the challenges faced were: No in-person Head Start within the past year, staffing challenges, parental programs slow to respond within the Head Start academy, and no longwood faculty/students allowed in the classrooms at the Head Start facility. These limitations due to Covid-19 gave the researchers a low response rate in order to have a more accurate research response.

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