Reflection

Throughout this year I was tasked with understanding how parental involvement affects students from an early age. For example, if a parent is highly involved in a child’s life, the child will more than likely do better academically in school. The idea that early onset involvement can lead a student to have a bright future has become hypnotic in society; many have even seen this as an explanation as to why some students have a higher success rate. This said, my research studied students (51, aged three to five) enrolled at a head start in Farmville, Virginia due to the fact that these students come from a lower socio-economic status and because of this, they may not have as much parental involvement as desired compared to a parent from a slightly higher economic status that is actively encouraging involvement (at home family activities or educational support).

To be able to test the issue discussed, my peers and I had to brainstorm a family fun time activity that would promote parental involvement as well as engage the child. The activity also had to be able to meet all SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound), which was a topic I had never done. My team and I later chose to do an astronaut pudding activity that would teach children about gravity. After this, the 40 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University, which I was a part of, compiled a survey questionnaire that contained both open-ended and close-ended questions that were designed to evaluate SMART objectives of each of the five activities. At first, this was quite troublesome because it seemed as though every question had something we had to change since it didn’t meet every single SMART objective.

Once our activities and survey were sent home, the only thing left for my peers, and I was to have patience and wait. Weeks passed and we would receive one maybe two surveys per week. A little over a month goes by and we only receive 11 surveys back; given the 22% response rate, more research is needed to better understand the impact parental involvement has on children that attend Head Start. This said, we multiplied the data a total of nine times in order to be able to have a larger representation/ pool of data that could be used. Once receiving the data, I then had to begin using software such as RStudio and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to compute my quantitative findings, which at times could be a bit overwhelming (especially when having to recode variables). With this data, further research can be done with a larger pool and more candidates to see how significant parental involvement is to a child’s educational life.

In a larger context, understanding the effects parental involvement has on the child and its development is eye opening. For this study, the research problem was that families who have children in Head Start tend to have a low parental involvement rate which could lead to the child doing poorly in school. This would be because the child would have trouble learning certain skills needed to be able to progress into higher education levels; these children would fall behind their classmates that have a high level of parental involvement. If it’s true that if a parent is involved in the child’s life (support with education and promoting family time) the child will receive academic success, it will create a domino effect and encourage parents to do this before it’s too late. This will be an important “ingredient” for the possible remedy for many problems in education.

Parental involvement, and engagement in education, matters now more than ever because of the decline of having parents in child’s life. Like everything, this can be due to a variety of different reasons, but many have drawn attention to a rise in electronic devices, such as schools providing students with iPads, as well as parents working longer hours. The rise in electronic devices creates a divide between parents and teachers and leads to parents using other ways to communicate with teachers that isn’t face to face (email, text, call). In addition, many parents favor remote methods of teacher-parent conference methods (online portals, video portals) and are less likely to attend certain school activities. This shift from face-to-face communication to online communication is concerning because it will ultimately lead to having low parental involvement rates since parents will not be as active in their child’s life. While electronic devices and the media can help families stay informed of events, students are missing out on crucial developmental time when parents can’t offer time and support; this is especially true for lower income students in Head Start.

From what I have learned in this course, I can say that I can continue to use resources such as RStudio and SPSS in graduate school. This is because I will more than likely have to continue to do research and since this class gave me an idea of how to not only collect qualitative data but collect quantitative data, I will already be familiar on the steps necessary to conduct a study. Additionally, I have created a manual on how to do various things on RStudio and SPSS which will be a great tool on helping me code/ recode my variables needed for research. This course has prepared me in being able to conduct a successful study that met all SMART goals.