

Communicative Plan for Building Partnerships with Families and Communities

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Abstract

Schools, communities and families are the most important forces for children's development. The strengthening of professional cooperation highlights the educational characteristics of the different members, creating an integrated force and synergy that leads to the continuous learning and development of children. This communicative plan is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology, combined with Epstein's theory of Six Types of Involvement and the Family-School-Community Systems Model proposed by Dearing, Sibley and Nguyen, attempting to provide a concrete, practical plan for two-way communication between families and schools. At the same time, according to the Family-School-Community Systems Model, this communal plan discusses the contribution of school, family and community partnerships to children's learning and development.

Keyword: professional partnership; home-school cooperation; children's education

1. Introduction

The school environment, social environment and family environment play an essential role in children's behavior and psychological development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There is an interactive relationship between different environments, which has a positive or negative effect on young children's development (Rebekah et al., 2017). Therefore, establishing practical professional cooperation between professionals, parents, communities, and children is conducive to children's healthy development. However, school education professionals may still ignore family and community cooperation because they are not familiar with the cooperative relationship model (Beining, 2011). This communicative plan is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology and provides practical strategies for establishing effective partnerships between schools, parents and communities through the analysis of theories and models.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The definition of professional partnership

A partnership means the relationship between two people or all. The essential concept is related to rights, obligations and equality (Gilling, 1990). In early childhood education, a professional partnership is between early childhood professionals, children and their families. The purpose of establishing effective collaborative relationships is to support children's health, learning and development (Flottman et al., 2011). Educators and families can establish an equal and meaningful positive partnership through effective communication (Rebekah et al., 2017).

First of all, the partnership's professionalism is embodied in the understanding of communication and cooperative planning of childcare professionals. Early childhood professionals make professional commitments in partnerships and respect each other's roles, experience and expertise (Flottman et al., 2011). Secondly, a professional partnership means that educators, parents and communities recognize their responsibilities to children and establish common child development goals. In other words, the partnership between schools, families, and communities requires the tripartite parties to organise effective communication, build an equity structure, and promote effective plans (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

2.2 The importance of professional partnerships for children's education

In a professional partnership, schools, families and communities are all promoters of children's growth. Simultaneously, practical professional cooperation can meet stakeholders' individual needs (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). For children, a

professional partnership is conducive to meeting children's needs in all aspects and ensuring the continuity of learning and development in early childhood.

The learning and development of young children have changed, and they need a variety of levels and types of support from early childhood professionals (DEECD & VCAA, 2016). Especially for children with special needs who need additional assistance, professional partnerships support the practice of inclusive education (Flottman et al., 2011). For children's families, partnerships can help solve the family's urgent needs and provide child families with professional services. Family background has a direct effect on the growth of children. Parents' views of the school and their relationship with educators may determine children's view of their school education (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999).

Besides, as far as professionals are concerned, they can use their skills, knowledge, and partnership experience. First, professionals of different backgrounds can share information and plan children's learning and development through effective communication (Flottman et al., 2011). Professionals from different environments will share children's information from different perspectives, and the cooperative team will assist according to the different needs of children to achieve common goals. Secondly, professionals also learn from each other in the team and continue to learn (Flottman et al., 2011). A positive partnership allows them to learn different professionals' knowledge and experience while defining roles and responsibilities.

2.3 The main components and the rationale of the plan

Schools, communities and families are the most important forces for children's development. The strengthening of professional cooperation highlights the educational characteristics of the different members, creating an integrated force and synergy that leads to the continuous learning and development of children. To make professional partnerships more practical, scholars have put forward a variety of theories and models. This communicative plan is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology, combined with Epstein's theory of Six Types of Involvement and the Family-School-Community Systems Model proposed by Dearing, Sible and Nguyen.

Bronfenbrenner believes that the natural environment is the primary source of influence on human development. He believes that the developing individual is in the middle or nested in several environmental systems from the natural environment (like the family) to the indirect environment (like the broad culture). Each system interacts with other systems and individuals, affecting many essential aspects of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology encourages people to think about the different levels and types of environmental effects that may affect children's development.

Epstein then applied environmental effects to the partnership between school and family. Epstein proposed that home-school cooperation activities can be summarised into six types, including attention to opportunities for families to participate in schools, families and communities, as well as potentially essential results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). This theory helps guide the development of a balanced and comprehensive partnership program. Dearing, Sible and Nguyen emphasised the two-way relationship between family-school-community investment based on the Bronfenbrenner mesosystem concept to discuss the intermediary mechanism of professional partnerships further.

2.4 Family investment in children's education

The family is the initial learning and growth environment for children, and the education and assistance of professionals to children is based on the understanding of family knowledge (DEECD & VCAA, 2016). Epstein proposed that the professional partnership between school, family and community enhances parents' ability to nurture their children and strengthens the relationship between parents and other people in the school and the community (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Epstein believes that the school is "seeing students as children" in "home-school cooperation". When partners recognise their common interests and responsibilities to children, they will work together to create better plans and opportunities for children (Epstein et al., 2002). Therefore, parents as cooperative members need to invest in children's education in the cooperative relationship.

From the perspective of social science research, one of the primary mechanisms for families to participate in children's educational achievements is "social capital" (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). "Social capital" is the mutual support, norms and responsibilities of social members (Bourdieu, 1986). The social capital created in the family, community and school through home-school cooperation may help weaken the adverse effects of family economic conditions and community environment on children's growth (Dearing, 2014). If parents can spend time caring about their children, establish good relationships with their children, and keep in touch with the school, and are willing to take actions to

support their children's learning and participate in parent committees, they will build a valuable social network, and this social capital will help their children growth (Dearing et al., 2015).

3. Key approaches developing children's development

3.1 Enhancing two-way cooperation

Interaction occurs when people in schools, families, and communities interact and work together. Children are the centre of interaction and the prominent role in education (Epstein et al., 2002). Epstein's Six Types of Involvement theory proposes two-way communication between family and school and community support (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). The relationship and role between family, school, and community may be at the institutional level (such as the school invites families to participate in certain activities)-including all families, children, educators and communities, or at the individual level (such as a single parent communicating with a teacher) -including a teacher, a parent, a child, a community partner or a small group.

The Family-School-Community Systems Model also reflects that families, schools, and communities share capital in their two-way communication. In other words, teachers' cognition and attitude, the cognition and attitude of parents, and the influence of growth-promoting community affordance on the development of children overlap and accumulate. Therefore, parents and teachers' relationship will continue to affect the growth of students of different ages and grades (Dearing et al., 2015).

On the one hand, the two-way communication between family and school helps both parties share their children's school life and family life. Subsequently, teachers can provide children with learning strategies based on the family environment and parents' expectations, which are also a supplement to classroom learning strategies (Dearing et al., 2015). On the other hand, a positive family-teacher relationship may promote a positive child-teacher relationship. This means that the family's investment in children's education may promote teachers' positive educational attitudes, and it may also contribute to the transformation of children's attitudes toward school (Dearing et al., 2015). Besides, the role of community partners is reflected in providing support to families and schools. In particular, the community provides academic resources for low-income families and schools (Sanders, 2001).

3.2 Improving the learning development impact of partnerships

Epstein's theory sees students as the centre. The indisputable fact is that students are the protagonists in their education, development and academic success. The partnership between school, family, and community does not simply guarantee that students will succeed. On the contrary, the purpose of partnership activities may be to attract, guide, and motivate students to succeed independently. An essential assumption of this theory is that if students feel that someone cares about them and encourages them to study hard, they will do their best to study and insist on studying in school instead of dropping out of school (Epstein, et al., 2002). The partnership between family and school does not guarantee that students will be successful, but it can promote students' success in participation in such a tripartite partnership model.

Dearing et al. (2015) believe that the critical factors for children's learning initiative and persistent individual differences are achievement motivation and achievement-related attributions. When parents actively participate in education and express positive encouragement to their children's learning potential, children will gradually form a parent-oriented achievement motivation, which also forms a positive attitude towards their learning. Besides, the family also plays a central role in developing children's learning strategies and skills (Dearing et al., 2015). First of all, parents help children do their homework may provide opportunities for children to improve their learning skills and strategies. Secondly, parents, teachers and community members can help schools and social institutions adjust teaching strategies according to students' characteristics.

4. Implementation of the communicative plan

In Dearing, Sibley and Nguyen's Family-School-Community Systems Model, social capital (family, community and school), children's attributes and motivations, and children's learning skills and strategies are three intermediaries that interact. Simultaneously, these three intermediaries also reflect the importance of family participation in education for children's academic achievement and learning. Therefore, a communicative plan that encourages professional partnerships between families, schools, and communities becomes extremely important.

4.1 Establishing collaborative communication for knowledge sharing

Sharing knowledge promotes social capital accumulation between parents and schools (Dearing et al., 2015). Therefore, professional partnerships need to cooperate and communicate to promote knowledge sharing. In Epstein's theory of Six

Types of Involvement, the second way to participate is to establish a two-way communication channel between family and school (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004).

Parent-teacher meeting is a very effective way of home-school communication, which can affect the establishment of parent-teacher relationship and students' progress (Hornby, 2011). In a parent-teacher meeting, both participants will gain social capital (Dearing et al., 2015). Teachers and schools as providers of capital need to organise meetings to ensure effective communication. Teachers need to prepare parent-teacher meetings in advance. Sending invitation letters and parent guides is not only expresses the welcome to parents to participate but also help parents arrange time in advance and prepare for the meeting. Parents can preset the content of communication with teachers according to the guide (Hornby, 2011). In a parent-teacher meeting, the teacher needs to formulate the meeting agenda for effective communication in a limited time. Parents can gain child development information in the meeting, understand the children's learning content and learning progress (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Moreover, teachers can also understand parents' behaviour and academic expectations for their children through communication.

One of the goals of teacher-parent meetings is to encourage parents to participate in children's education and empower parents to participate in school decision-making (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Teachers can communicate with parents through emails, text messages, weekly folders, and other ways. Thus, teachers get parents' ideas and suggestions on the school at any time. However, considering the diversity of parents in Australia's cross-cultural background, in order to gain more parents' participation in communication and decision-making, teachers need to consider more methods (Hornby, 2011). For example, multilingual manuals, home-school diaries and assistance from community agencies.

Besides, schools can encourage and organise parent volunteer services. Parents can act as a valuable resource for school education, such as assisting teachers to carry out student activities or enriching student classrooms with their resources (Hornby, 2011). Meanwhile, parents also get the opportunity to observe their children's school life. Parents understand their children's learning advantages and limitations based on observing their children's learning level and making social comparisons with peers. Therefore, parents can also communicate with teachers about their children's personality and develop learning strategies that are more suitable for their children (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

4.2 Building bridges between home and school learning

The home-school partnership can help children make progress, and teacher-parent cooperation can be achieved through home-class projects (Hornby, 2011). Dearing, Sibley and Nguyen believe that children's achievement is attributed to motivation and parents' participation in education have a positive relationship. Families can also promote the development of children's strategies and skills. Therefore, the communicative plan between home and school should also include a link between school learning and home learning.

Epstein encourages parents to participate in their children's home learning activities. Parents and teachers can achieve communication through the connection between school learning and home learning (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Meanwhile, parents participate in education to promote children's motivation for autonomous learning (Dearing et al., 2015). "Homework" refers not only to independent completion but also to students' interaction with others at home or in the community, connecting studies with real life. Parents helping their children at home means encouragement, listening, feedback, praise, guidance, supervision and discussion (Epstein et al., 2002).

Teachers can provide parents with information and ideas on helping students at home, including helping children with homework, completing course-related activities, and making learning decisions and plans. For example, teachers can provide parents with the school's requirements and expectations for each course. They can hold individual seminars to help parents understand how to improve children's learning skills to overcome learning difficulties or enhance time and learning task management capabilities. The regular assignments require student's homework completed by interacting with parents to discuss students' content and learning experience in class. Teachers need to design some interactive learning activities to encourage families to develop children's annual learning goals, advancement or work plans. (Epstein, et al., 2002; Dearing et al., 2015; Hornby, 2011).

Children are self-confident and participatory learners. They gradually form learning tendencies and patterns in family and community learning. Children's learning motivation, learning behaviour and learning ability are affected by others' interaction (DEECD & VCAA, 2016). On the one hand, parental involvement in family learning helps children form attributions for ability and achievement, and children may also have a positive learning attitude (Dearing et al., 2015). On the other hand, teachers and parents communicate through their children's homework, which helps teachers adjust teaching strategies according to their children's learning abilities and learning problems and find more suitable learning methods (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Finally, community agency projects can also communicate with schools and

parents to provide academic support for children, including community volunteer reading counselling, parenting classes and school preparation skills training (Dearing et al., 2015).

5. The possible challenges and strategies

The communicative plan may be able to guide schools, families and communities to establish professional partnerships. However, the effectiveness of professional partnerships depends on the involvement of individual members. Professional partnerships should be reciprocal, equity and practical (Flottman et al., 2011). If the school, family and community have a negative attitude towards the partnership, this may mean that the partnership faces the challenge of disintegrating. Therefore, in the face of communication and cooperation challenges arising from diverse backgrounds, targeted solutions are necessary.

From the perspective of parents, whether they can participate effectively depends on their views on various issues of school and family education. First, parents' perceptions of their roles and abilities in children's education may affect their effective participation (Hornby, 2011). On the one hand, parents believe that their abilities are insufficient to assume the responsibility of educating their children. Parents tend to provide their children with material conditions and improve their children's educational environment by improving their financial capabilities (Hornby, 2011). Additionally, the attribution of parents' achievement is positively correlated with the attribution of children's learning achievement (Dearing et al., 2015). Some parents believe that they do not have enough academic ability to help their children or believe that their children's academic performance depends on their children's intelligence and parental abilities. Therefore, parents who hold such achievement attributions may not have enough confidence in school education. Meanwhile, the parent's attitude may cause their children to have a negative attitude towards school education.

On the other hand, while some schools recognise the role and significance of family education in students' growth, they also provide low participation opportunities due to low-quality communication with parents (Thomas et al., 2015). The diversity of culture and language is a challenge for educators and families (Amatea et al., 2012). First, there may be language barriers in the communication between parents and teachers, which hinders family participation in education. Simultaneously, the attitudes of families with different cultural backgrounds towards children's education may cause teachers to think that parents hold negative attitudes towards participation in education, causing some interns to avoid interacting with diverse student families (Knight-McKenna & Hollingsworth, 2016). Secondly, immigrants and refugees' family background may cause cultural integration and educational funding shortages, and partnerships may also be challenging to establish. Parents' personal experience of studying abroad may affect the way they communicate with their children's school.

Moreover, some parents' language barriers make their children become the role of communication with the school, and the weakening of parents' responsibilities makes it difficult to communicate successfully with the school. In addition, the challenges faced by refugee family groups are more economic issues. Parents may not provide adequate support for children's education due to work and financial pressure (CMY, 2015).

In the face of potential challenges in implementing communicative, some parents' language barriers also provide operational solutions. There are many ways of home-school communication. Adapting to children's overall development and meeting parents' actual needs, it is indispensable to enrich and broaden the communication channels between home and school. Appropriately increase the communication opportunities between teachers and parents may strengthen interaction, urge them to reach a consensus to a certain extent. The professional partnership is a friendly relationship of equality, harmony, mutual trust, and interdependence.

First, schools and communities can help parents realise the importance of the family in professional partnerships and strengthen their initiative to participate in their children's education. Schools and communities can open parent schools or other training courses to help parents become a qualified cultivator. Professionals in schools and community organisations can use their professional knowledge and methods, combined with the reality of home and school, to formulate reasonably and targeted learning plans and content. Professional parent education helps parents recognise the family's pivotal role in children's growth, thereby encouraging parents to actively participate in the cooperative relationship (Hornby, 2011). Meanwhile, schools and communities can encourage the exchange of information between parents. Schools and communities can organise sharing sessions between families. Parents can exchange their views on school education and share their children's growth experience and current situation (Hornby, 2011). The establishment of communication between parents is conducive to understanding school education and active participation in school activities (Dearing et al., 2015).

Second, educators need to respect the family background and flexibly adjust communication methods to achieve active and effective communication. Teachers can learn about children's family background and perspectives by designing courses related to children's lives.

They then can use practical communication skills to establish positive and meaningful connections with the family (Thomas et al., 2015). Simultaneously, schools can hold cultural sharing activities, and community organisations can also provide cross-language communication services and language courses for families from different cultures. The purpose of respecting and promoting cultural integration is to create a welcoming, safe, and belonging educational cooperation environment (CMY, 2015). Besides, to assist in establishing professional partnerships between schools, families, and communities, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) discussed the school consultants' role. Professional school consultants can cooperate with teachers and the community to play multiple roles such as contact intermediaries, managers and facilitators.

6. Conclusion

Home-school communication is a two-way interactive process. Teachers and parents can pass and share information about children's learning and life in two different educational environments at school and home. Starting from mutual understanding, both teachers and parents establish a strategic cooperative relationship after reaching a resounding consensus to create conditions and make efforts for children's comprehensive development.

This communicative plan is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology, combined with Epstein's theory of Six Types of Involvement and the Family-School-Community Systems Model proposed by Dearing, Sibley and Nguyen as the professional cooperative relationship between schools, families and communities. The establishment of the provides operational guidance. First of all, this communicative plan attempts to provide a concrete, practical plan for two-way communication between families and schools based on Epstein's theory to help families and schools accumulate social capital. Secondly, according to the Family-School-Community Systems Model, this communal plan discusses the contribution of school, family and community partnerships to children's learning and development. Simultaneously, based on the impact of family participation in education on children's learning achievement, this plan also attempts to provide a detailed home-school cooperation plan. Finally, based on the literature and existing investigations, this communicative plan also provides a reference strategy for the partnership establishment's potential challenges.

Besides, this communicative plan has not discussed the impact of the Family-School-Community professional partnership on children's socialisation. Children as the main body of education, their sense of belonging and subjective initiative should get educators and families' attention. In the multi-dimensional ecosystem, the influence of the tripartite relationship of family, school and community on children's socialisation is worthy of further study.

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