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Parent Communities: Key Indicator in Increasing Parent Involvement and Satisfaction

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Parent Communities: Key Indicator in Increasing Parent Involvement and Satisfaction

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

The effect of parent involvement in schools has been a research concern for decades. However, little research has been conducted on the impact of building parent communities within a preschool program. This study aims to investigate the effects of developing relationships among parents, building parent community, and determining whether or not this increases overall parent satisfaction and involvement. A questionnaire survey will be carried out on 26 families using a pre/post-test pre-experimental design. The findings will show that building positive adult relationships among parents increases overall parent satisfaction and involvement.

Key words: parent involvement, parent satisfaction, parent community, preschool program

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To my beautiful children, Dylan, Tessa, Jakob and Isaac, for their patience and encouragement they provided when I needed to be away at school or working on my paper.

I would like to thank my mother. She has been a shining example of hard work, dedication, faith and perseverance throughout my lifetime. Always my biggest supporter and cheerleader and never losing faith in me, even when I couldn't see the path ahead myself.

Thank you to my many friends that have continued to listen to and support and encourage me to continue this process even when I was ready to give up.

I am sincerely grateful to the strong women I have met and been supported and encouraged by at St. Cloud State University. Jane Minnema, Amy Knopf, and Karin Ihnen have restored my faith in the process. I am forever grateful that you appeared in my life at just the right time.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my children: Dylan Thomas, Tessa June, Jakob Christopher and Isaac Daniel. You have inspired me to work hard and complete this process so that I could be an example for you. My wish is that you will believe in yourselves and know that you can accomplish great things.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

The importance of parent involvement in a child's development and learning has been a topic of interest generally and more specifically in research for decades. Family involvement has been linked to achievement and success in school. "Meaningful school-family relationships begin in preschool and have the potential to shape the child's and the family's perceptions of school over time" (Nitecki, 2015, p. 196). All families want the best for their children and a strong step is establishing and maintaining strong partnerships between families and schools. A few typical preschool parent expectations include:

- To be a happy and healthy child;
- To learn to overcome obstacles;
- To be successful at whatever their child chooses to do in life;
- To know they are loved;
- To gain independence;
- To learn to be respectful, tolerant and compassionate people.

Parents who have high expectations have positive effects on their children's academic achievement. These students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades, move on to the next grade, attend school more regularly and graduate and go on to post-secondary school (Karakus & Savas, 2012).

In 1988, Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University developed a framework for defining different types of parent involvement. She writes about the many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. The main reason being is to help all

youngsters succeed in school and in later life. (Epstein, 1988). We, as educators, must facilitate and nurture relationships and connections among parents and families of students in our program, specifically preschool, in order to foster involvement within our school and programs. Epstein (1988) developed a framework for examining parent involvement that contains six broad categories:

1. **Parenting**, in which schools help families with their parenting skills by providing information on children's developmental stages and offering advice on learning-friendly home environments;
2. **Communicating**, or working to educate families about their child's progress and providing opportunities for parents to communicate with the school;
3. **Volunteering**, which ranges from offering opportunities for parents to visit the school to finding ways to train them to work in the classroom;
4. **Decision-making**, where schools include families as partners in school organizations and committees;
5. **Learning at home**, in which schools and educators share ideas to promote at-home learning through homework and other learning related activities;
6. **Community collaboration**, where schools identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs.

Although Epstein's list is quite comprehensive, it has not expanded since its conception. After searching for more current research and data Epstein's framework is possibly still the best information available. As parent involvement has developed and grown I believe a seventh type of involvement might be Developing Parent Relationship/

Connectedness. While there is much research around the topic of general parent involvement, little research-based information exists regarding the importance of parents building positive peer relationships amongst each other within a program and how that might impact the school experience, including satisfaction and involvement. Building new relationships, whatever the circumstances, takes time. If educators hope to make meaningful, lasting change within school communities and increase parent involvement and satisfaction, then identifying building relationships among school parents early on and taking the time to develop them seems to be worth the investment.

Statement of the Problem

The current problem being addressed is the experience of the preschool parent and their lack of involvement and, therefore, possible lower rate of satisfaction. Research has shown that parents who become involved in their child's education continue to stay involved and are more positive and satisfied with their child's education and educational experience (Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

After teaching preschool and parent education for many years, the researcher continued to meet and work with parents that felt "out of the loop" and disconnected with what was happening at school. It wasn't as though they didn't want to be involved, they just did not know how. With the busyness of raising a young family and trying to keep it all together, it is difficult to put energy into reaching out to parents of your child's classmates.

Importance of the Problem

In a general sense, parent involvement has been shown to increase student success and achievement. Given the lack of data-based information to describe parent involvement and

connectedness more research is necessary to identify ways schools can better meet the needs of families with young children. Preschool may set the stage for strong partnership across family and between families and schools (Kreider, 2002). Just as each family is unique, each school system is as well. This makes connecting with families in a personal way a challenge. It is important to take the time to find out what parents need to feel connected and to also facilitate opportunities for parents to connect to build their own peer network. Providing opportunities, facilitating relationships and monitoring and adjusting parent involvement programming is a probably a good place to start building parent community within a preschool program.

Study Purpose and Research Question

This study will examine the implications of building a parent community within a preschool program and whether or not it increases parent satisfaction and involvement. To do so, the research project will address this research question: *When a parent community is supported within a preschool program, how does parent satisfaction and involvement change?*

For the purposes of this research study, the variables include the parent community, parent satisfaction, and actual parent involvement. The independent variable, *Parent Community*, is defined as a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, experiences and goals. The dependent variable, *Parent Satisfaction*, is defined as fulfillment of parents' wishes, expectations, or needs, and the pleasure derived from this. The dependent variable, *Parent Involvement*, is defined as the fact or condition of participating in something.

The study hypothesis is when parents feel connected with each other they are more willing and more motivated to become more involved in the classroom, the school system, and with each other. Given ample opportunities to make those connections will encourage parents and families to become more involved, thus experiencing increasing overall satisfaction with their child's preschool programming.

Operational Definitions

Parent involvement. Parent involvement will be measured by the number of times parents participate in programming. This includes group conversation, parent-to-parent conversation, attending programs offered, and any additional communication initiated by the parent such as text, phone call, or email.

Parent satisfaction. Parent satisfaction will be measured by the scores received on the satisfaction survey developed, piloted, and distributed by the researcher.

Preschool program. The site used for research is a private faith-based preschool program. This school is located in a middle-sized city in the Midwest. Twenty-five families are currently registered in the preschool program. Twenty-one families participated in the study. Sixteen of the families have child(ren) in the 4-5-year-old program, which meets 3 days a week for 3 or 7 hours, depending on which program the families registered for. Nine families in the 3-4-year-old program meet twice a week for 3 hours each time. There is not a parent component to the current preschool program. Parents are responsible to drop their child off and to pick them up at the end of class.

Parent community. The preschool parent community at the site consists of 25 sets of parents. All 26 children are currently living with both parents. There is limited diversity with the majority of the parents and children being Caucasian.

Conclusions

This chapter contained information regarding the importance of parent involvement in a child's learning and how we define different types of involvement. Joyce Epstein was instrumental in developing a framework in which we are able to broaden our way of thinking about involvement.

The following chapter will review the literature pertaining to the importance of parent involvement and its correlation to parent satisfaction. Building quality involvement is also discussed as it directly connects with overall parent involvement and satisfaction long term.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The objective of this review is to analyze current research concerning parent involvement and satisfaction within preschool programs and to focus on meaningful parent involvement. Parent involvement has been shown to impact children's school success (Karakus & Savas, 2012), along with the level of satisfaction among parents. The researcher will also elaborate on what makes this type of community building more meaningful.

Parent Satisfaction

Parent satisfaction is similar to consumer satisfaction in that it affects the parents' loyalty and commitment to the schools their children attend. Dissatisfied parents can move to other school districts or send their children to other private schools. There are many ways to determine parent satisfaction. The research study by Fantuzzo, Perry, and Childs (2006) was "designed to investigate a scale developed to measure parent satisfaction with experiences of various aspects of their child's early education program" (p.142) as well as empirically test the Parent Satisfaction with Educational Experiences Scale (PSEE). The study evaluated parent satisfaction in three dimensions: teacher contact experiences, classroom contact experiences, and school contact experiences. The study was conducted from the perspective of parents and teachers in pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade in a large urban district.

The second objective was to "determine whether there were differences as a function of child, care provider, or educational program characteristics" (Fantuzzo et al., 2006, p. 149). According to the text, the "study was twofold: (1) to develop a reliable measure of parent satisfaction of school contact for parents of young children; (2) to use this instrument to

examine parent satisfaction levels across different demographic groups and different early childhood programs” (2006, p. 144). The researchers hypothesized that parents would report higher levels of satisfaction with programs that intentionally include practices that include parent contact. Also, parents experiencing barriers to involvement would be less satisfied with schools. This is important for the current study to take into consideration as to not assume all parents define satisfaction in the same way. Additionally, the Fantuzzo study was clear in stating that parent satisfaction levels fluctuate throughout a school year, so it is important and valuable to distribute a satisfaction scale several times a year to make sure parent needs are being met.

Parent Involvement

One of the many challenges in studying parent satisfaction and involvement is the simple fact that there is no universal definition of parent satisfaction or parent involvement. While the dictionary might define these words, administrators, parents, and teachers all interpret them differently. A study examining understandings of parent involvement in early childhood programs by Hilado, Kallemeyn, and Phillips (2013) focused on how parent involvement is understood in an early childhood program. The authors provided several examples of varying definitions of parent involvement and how this sends mixed messages to parents and families regarding expectations.

Researchers found parent involvement definitions and understanding, program and family contexts, and correlation of administrator’s understanding of parent involvement to be the three main themes of the study. The administrators reporting low levels of parent involvement had a much more rigid definition of what parent involvement looks like. On the

other hand, administrators with a more flexible definition of parent involvement reported a much higher level of parent involvement. This is important to note as those with broader definitions of parent involvement were more likely to express a positive view of their families than those with narrower definitions. It is obvious that a broad, yet clear, definition is necessary to make sure parents, teachers, and administrators are on the same page. It is obvious that a broad, yet clear, definition of parent involvement needs to be communicated to parents, teachers, and administrators to make sure they are all on the same page.

Building Quality Involvement

Preschool is an important time, bridging learning at home to a formalized learning environment and setting the tone for K-12 education. As preschool is becoming a standard part of the formal educational system in the United States, the role of families cannot be minimized. Meaningful school–family relationships begin in preschool and have the potential to shape the child’s and family’s perceptions of school over time (Nitecki, 2015). Nitecki spent time researching school-family partnership in a small preschool program, much like the current site. The case study focused on three dimensions of parent involvement: the multidimensional nature of the relationships (or social interactions that extend beyond the typical teacher-parent relationship), a welcoming environment, and an effort to enhance parents’ ideas about school.

Parent involvement is a key component of early childhood education policy and programs. When it comes to in-school preschool programs, however, the parent involvement piece is often left out. Rather than defining a parent’s role as “involvement”, Nitecki (2015) shifts to using the term “partnership”. This implies a more collaborative approach between

parents and the school. “Partnerships are child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across developmentally appropriate social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains” (Nitecki, 2015, p. 198).

As universal preschool efforts expand access, many districts, community-based organizations, and private schools are increasingly involved in educating preschool children. Preschool children and their families are unique in that their first experiences with school are formed during these critical years. It is imperative that preschool programs build meaningful and respectful relationships with all families. Epstein’s model of parent involvement provides a framework for schools to structure meaningful opportunity.

Studies show that parent involvement increases student achievement (Zellman, 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that attending school meetings or events is the leading form of parent participation in schools, followed by school fundraising activities. Parent participation is greater with preK-8 students than with high school students. Research states that once parents become involved, they continue to stay involved (Karakus & Savas, 2012). The importance and value of engaging parents at the preschool level will heed lasting reward for both the families as well as the school system. Overall, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- Be promoted, pass their classes;
- Attend school regularly;

- Have better social skills and adapt well to school;
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary school.

Little research has been done regarding the impact of building relationships between the parents of the students within a classroom. Families in general—and those from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds in particular—often wait for guidance from educators before interacting with the school. The problem with the “waiting” is missed opportunity for families, the school community, and the classroom community due to lack of connectedness.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this literature review there is marginal research that recognizes the importance of parent involvement and satisfaction, though, of that research, the importance and value of engaging parents and families early on is beneficial for everyone long term.

Chapter 3 will review the purpose of the study, to survey parents to find out if building stronger parent community will increase their satisfaction and involvement. The research design, participants, setting, data collection strategies, study procedures and data analysis will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview

While almost all schools promote parent involvement, there are different types of involvement. Parent involvement can make a difference in a child's education, so providing meaningful opportunities for parents to participate is vital. Building relationships and fostering ongoing communication between parents and the school community at an early age will set the tone for their child's educational journey.

Study Purpose

This study will investigate the effectiveness of building parent community within a preschool program by using a pre/post-test action research design. St. Cloud State University will be contacted and Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be completed in order to complete this study. The researcher has completed IRB training. Permission from the principal at the preschool site will be obtained before conducting the pre/post-test for data collection. Families will be invited to participate in the study.

Researcher as Participant

There is little empirical research conducted on the topic of building parent community, so the researcher will be involved in the study as a participant to offer background and professional experiences in working with families of young children.

The researcher in this study is a teacher and has over twenty years of experience working with early childhood parents and families. Currently, she is teaching 3-4-5 year olds 5 days a week. The 3-year-olds meet for 3 hours twice a week, and the 4-5-year-olds meet 3 days a week for either 3 hours or a full 7-hour day. There is not a formal parent involvement

piece to the preschool program at this private faith-based preschool program. This school is a middle-sized city located in the Midwest. Parents are welcome to volunteer in the classroom and attend parent-teacher conferences in the spring, but there are no requirements. Oftentimes, if the preschool child has older siblings within the system, parents have already made connections with other staff and parents. These families tend to be more involved as the familiarity of how the system works has been set in place.

Participants and Setting

This study will be carried out with the cooperation of preschool families at within this private faith-based preschool. The criterion for the participants of this study is to be a current parent of a preschooler in the 3-4-5-year-old programs at the school. The school is a preschool through sixth grade school system housing over 300 children. It is a catholic school in the community and their mission is to create a Christ-centered, Catholic learning community focused on a commitment of Christian service, academic excellence, and spiritual growth. The sample is a convenience sample as they are families at the researcher's current place of employment. Sixteen of the families have a child(ren) in the 4-5-year-old program, and nine families have a child(ren) in the 3-4-year-old program. Informed consent will be given before administering the survey.

Instruments

This study will be carried out with the cooperation of parents completing a satisfaction survey, which will be distributed prior to any intervention to determine the current level of satisfaction and involvement. After interventions take place, another satisfaction survey will be distributed to determine change in the level of satisfaction and/or involvement, if any. The

focus of the satisfaction survey will be on three areas: communication, parent involvement, and general satisfaction.

The survey will be comprised of 12 questions regarding parent satisfaction in the areas of communication, parent involvement and general satisfaction. The survey will include a brief overview stating the purpose of this research as well as a description of the researcher. Parents will complete a twelve-item survey answering questions on a scale of 1-6.

Procedures

A satisfaction survey was constructed and piloted before administering it to the families involved. After the survey questions were revised for clarity and to ensure the instrument measured what is intended, the satisfaction survey was sent home in the weekly communication folder for the parents to complete. After receiving results, three interventions were introduced and implemented. The study lasted 6 weeks beginning February 2, 2017, and concluded March 16, 2017. At the completion of said interventions, the families were surveyed again to determine if overall satisfaction and level of involvement had changed.

Interventions

Family potluck event. In early February, families participating in the study were invited to attend a preschool potluck. Childcare was available after the meal to allow parents to mingle with other parents and to attend a short presentation on building parent communities and relationships. There was also an opportunity to ask questions about the information as well as information provided about upcoming events and opportunities to become involved.

Pasta and portfolio evening. In February, preschool families were invited to spend time at school sharing a meal and visiting their child's classroom. This is a school-wide event

designed to encourage families to interact with their children about all of the things happening at school. Teachers are present as well to answer any questions parents may have.

Drop by and play. Beginning Thursday, February 2, 2017, from 11:00 am–12:00 pm, the preschool classroom will be open for current preschool families to meet and play. Families will be encouraged to bring younger siblings, and educational materials will be made available for parents to take home. The researcher/classroom teacher will be available for questions and conversation, but the event is child/parent led. This will continue for 6 consecutive weeks.

Data Analysis

Since data collection for all interventions were based on attendance, frequency counts were determined to provide context for the descriptive data analyses of the survey satisfaction data. Survey statistical data analysis was conducted through the Statistical Consulting and Research Center at St. Cloud State University. Frequencies, T-test and Reliability will be used to analyze these numeric data.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

The purpose of my survey research project was to obtain parent perspective on their level of satisfaction and involvement in their child's preschool program. An overarching goal was to determine whether or not increasing opportunity for parents to connect with each other will increase their overall satisfaction and involvement. The data collected in the survey focused on parent experience in three different areas: general satisfaction, communication and parent involvement. Of the 25 families available in the program, 21 participated (84%) in the survey.

Parent Event Participation

The Family Potluck Event that was held at school where of the 21 families invited, 20 attended totaling 94 people. This meant that 95% of potential families participated. The setting and experience of the preschool potluck is a much more intimate and focused opportunity for parents to spend time getting to know each other while sharing a meal. Throughout the evening, the researcher spent time visiting with the families, making introductions and helping to make connections among the parents. There was also opportunity to visit and ask questions about the upcoming school year.

The Pasta and Portfolio Event was also held at school. For this event, 17 of the potential 21 preschool families attended this event, with a rate of 81% participation. This is a school-wide event where families come to school to informally visit the classroom, converse with the teacher and other parents and family members, and then share a meal together. This event not only allowed and encouraged parents and families to mingle in the preschool

classroom but also allowed the preschool families to join the larger school community for fellowship and a meal.

The Drop By and Play intervention met after class once a week for an hour. Nine families attended the event (56 people total over 6 weeks), with a participation rate of 43%. This event continued for 6 consecutive weeks. Ten of the 21 families were already at school the morning of this event, while the other 11 families never had class on the day this intervention was offered.

The results of the research obtained through my survey are explained and demonstrated in the figures below.

Demographic Results

The participants in my survey research study represented current parents of preschool children enrolled in the school.

Survey Numeric Results

Survey item internal reliability. In this section of Chapter 4, I report on the statistical analyses of the survey item results. Cronbach's α was used to demonstrate the internal reliability of the survey items for each of the parent indicators when the survey items are isolated for parent satisfaction, communication, and parent involvement. Cronbach's alpha is a measure used to assess the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items. In other words, the reliability of any given measurement refers to the extent to which it is a consistent measure of a concept. Although the standards for what makes a "good" α coefficient are entirely arbitrary and depend on your knowledge of the scale in question, many

methodologists recommend a minimum α coefficient between 0.65 and 0.8, or higher in many cases; α coefficients that are less than 0.5 are usually unacceptable.

The frequencies for each pie chart were determined by combined all frequencies for one item, combined for another item, and so on.

General satisfaction indicator. The General Satisfaction Scale consisted of four items. The four survey items include:

1. How satisfied are you with the number of opportunities provided to get to know other parents in your child's class?
2. How satisfied are you with the opportunities available for family involvement (events, education opportunities, resources)?
3. Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of your child's preschool education?
4. How satisfied are you with your sense of connectedness at our school?

For this set of survey items the reliability is ($\alpha = .7$), which demonstrated an appropriate level of internal consistency for this indicator.

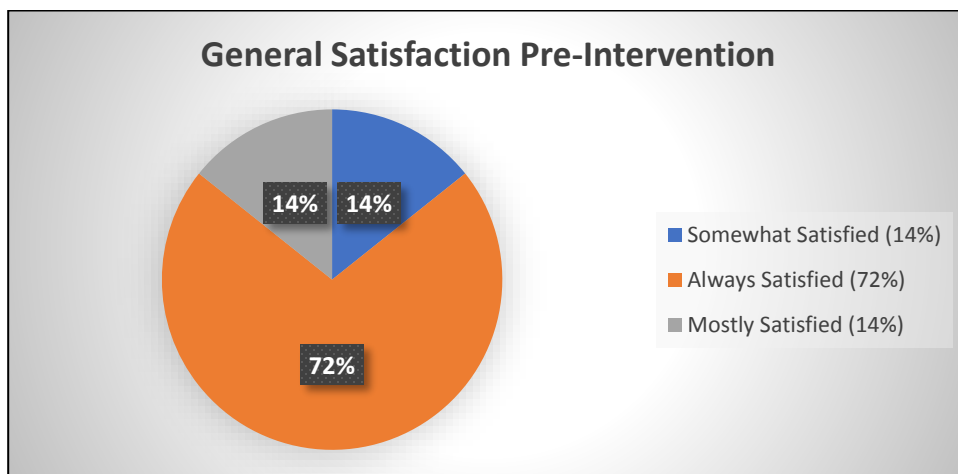


Figure 1. General satisfaction pre-intervention.

In Figure 1, the overall General Satisfaction Pre-Intervention ratings were as follows: 3 out of 21 people gave the rating of Somewhat Unsatisfied (14%), 15 of 21 people gave the rating of Mostly Satisfied (71%), and 3 of 21 people gave the rating of Always Satisfied (14%).

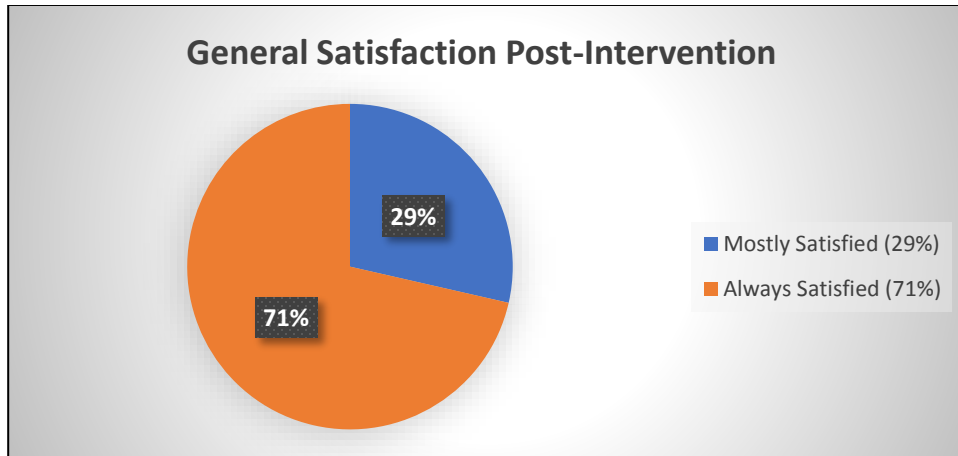


Figure 2. General satisfaction post-intervention.

In Figure 2, the overall General Satisfaction Post-Intervention ratings were as follows: 6 out of 21 people gave the rating of Mostly Satisfied (29%), and 15 of 21 people gave the rating of Always Satisfied (71%).

Communication. The Communication Scale consisted of four items. The four survey items include:

1. How well does the classroom teacher fill your need for communication about upcoming activities?
2. How well does the school email process work for your family?
3. How well does our school address your questions in a timely manner?
4. How well do teachers communicate with you regarding your child's development?

For this set of data the reliability is ($\alpha = .74$), which demonstrated an appropriate level of internal consistency for this indicator.

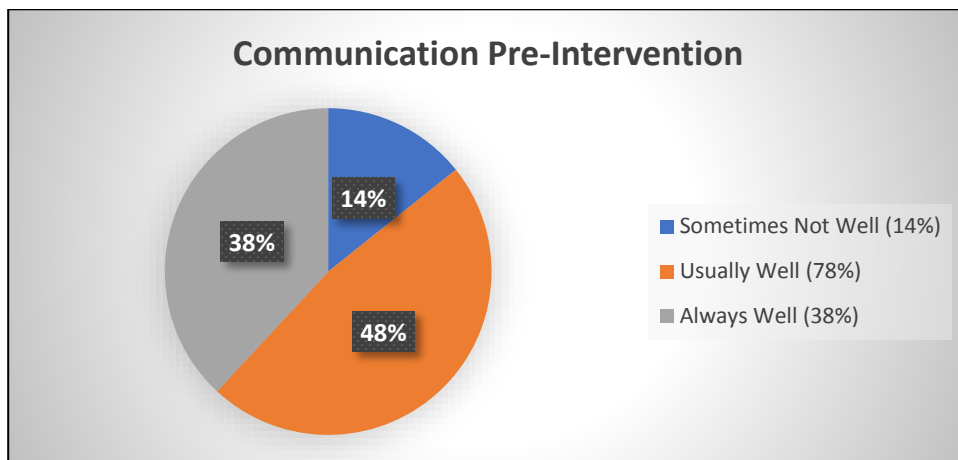


Figure 3. Communication pre-intervention.

In Figure 3, the overall Communication Pre-Intervention ratings were as follows: 3 out of 21 people gave the rating of Sometimes Not Well (14%), 10 out of 21 people gave the rating of Usually Well (48%), and 8 of 21 people gave the rating of Always Well (38%).

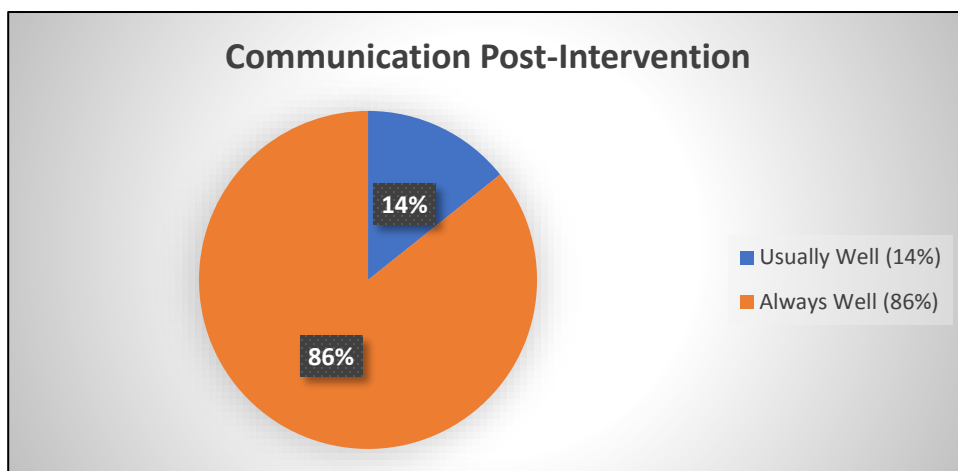


Figure 4. Communication post-intervention frequencies.

In Figure 4, the overall Communication Post-Intervention ratings were as follows: 3 out of 21 people gave the rating of Usually Well (14%), and 18 out 21 people gave the rating of Always Well (86%).

Parent involvement. The Parent Involvement Scale consisted of four items. The four survey items include:

1. How often are you welcomed upon entering the school?
2. How often do you engage with other parents from your child's class?
3. In the past school year, how often have you helped out at your child's school?
4. How often have you participated in child friendly activities occurring in your community?

For this set of data the reliability is ($\alpha = .31$).

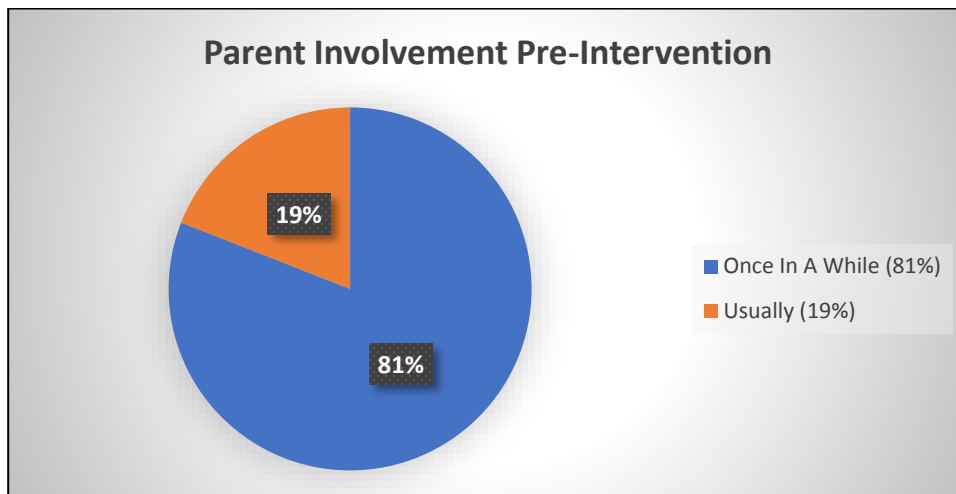


Figure 5. Parent involvement pre-intervention frequencies.

In Figure 5, the overall Parent Involvement Pre-Intervention ratings were as follows: 17 out of 21 people gave the rating of Once in a While (81%), and 4 out of 21 people gave the rating of Usually (19%).

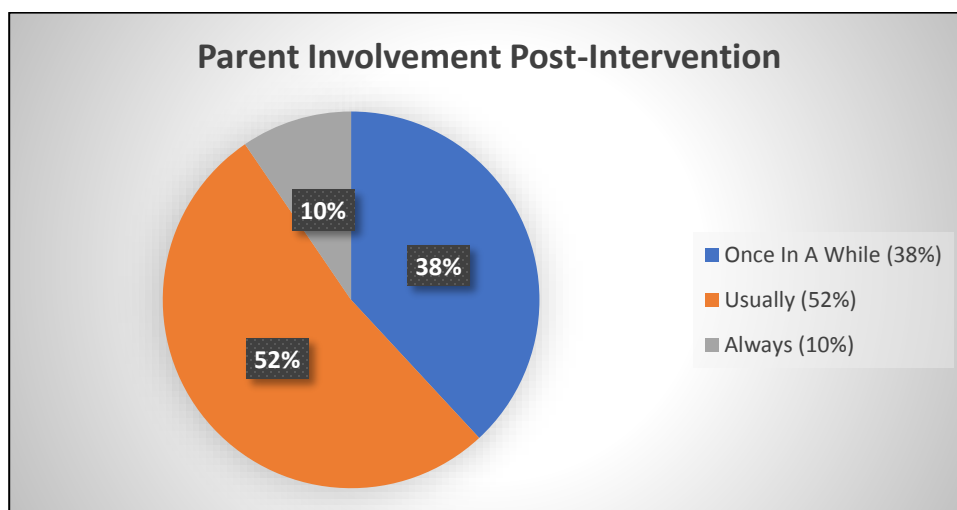


Figure 6. Parent involvement post-intervention frequencies.

In Figure 6, the overall Parent Involvement Post-Intervention ratings were as follows: 8 out of 21 people gave the rating of Once in a While (38%), 11 out of 21 people gave the rating of Usually (52%), and 2 of 21 people gave the rating of Always (10%).

Understanding that the internal reliability of the survey construction, for the most part, is at appropriate levels to analyze pre- and post-test results. The next section of my Chapter 4 presents the statistical analyses for each parent involvement and satisfaction indicator.

Paired T-test Results

T-tests were used to test the hypotheses of when parents feel connected with each other, they are more willing and more motivated to become more involved in the classroom, the school system, and with each other. Given ample opportunities to make those connections, will encourage parents and families to become more involved, thus experiencing increased overall satisfaction with their child's preschool programming. T-tests were used to assess whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. For this study then, a Paired T-test was conducted to compare pre- and post-test parent involvement and

satisfaction indicators when parent events are provided in preschool programming. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Pre- and Post-Test Results for Parent Indicators

Paired t-test table

	Pre-test		Post-test		t (20)
	M	SD	M	SD	
General Satisfaction	3.35	0.43	3.81	0.32	.01**
Communication	3.52	0.54	3.95	0.13	.00**
Parent Involvement	2.57	0.43	3.31	0.58	.00**

** $p < .05$.

There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for General Satisfaction from Pre-Intervention ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .43$) to Post-Intervention ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .32$); $t(20) = .01$, $p = 0.05$. In other words, parent satisfaction with their child's preschool program increased at statistically significant levels when parents had opportunities to connect with one another in family events held at school.

There was also a statistically significant difference in the ratings for Communication from Pre-Intervention ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .54$) to Post-Intervention ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .13$); $t(20) = .00$, $p = 0.05$. Again, parent satisfaction with communication increased at statistically significant levels when parents were provided with opportunities to connect with other families at their child's preschool.

Parent Involvement also showed a statistically significant difference in the scores from Pre-Intervention ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .43$) to Post-Intervention ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .58$); $t(20) = .00$, $p = 0.05$. While this increase was smaller in comparison to the other two areas, satisfaction

with parent involvement increased at statistically significant levels when parents were given opportunity to become involved.

Conclusions

A pre/post survey was used in this study to determine whether or not providing several opportunities, or interventions, would increase overall parent satisfaction and involvement. The findings showed that both parent involvement and parent satisfaction did, in fact, increase. Results of this study will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study sought to determine whether building a parent community within a preschool program will increase parent satisfaction and/or parent involvement. It is hypothesized that when parents feel connected with each other they are more willing and apt to become more involved the classroom, school system, and with other families. Building the parent community allows parents to become comfortable and engaged with other families and, in turn, naturally encourages families to spend time together.

Study Findings Interpretations

Interventions. Overall, the interventions were a success as each of them encouraged and allowed parents' and families' opportunities to get to know each other. As parents became more familiar with each other, they began forming connections to build relationships with each other. Meaningful opportunities to become involved were discussed with the parents at each of the interventions.

While the participate rate for the third intervention, Drop by and Play, is lower than the other two interventions, the results are probably more meaningful in terms of practical significance. Drop by and Play occurred during the day on a day that only 10 preschoolers attended class (9 families). In order for participation rates to increase, Drop by and Play would need to be offered at a variety of times so more parents and children are able to attend. It should be noted that of the families already in the building, 100% participated at least once, which would warrant enough evidence to continue the intervention at this particular time.

Ideally, another Drop by and Play series would be offered on a day when the other class is already in the building.

Future Benefits for Children and Families

Current parents, as well as future families, can benefit from this study's findings. For instance, future families can be provided with opportunities to connect with each other in unique ways, as demonstrated by the interventions (family events) employed in this study. Future children can also benefit from this study's findings. Henderson and Berla (1994) stated that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status. Instead there are three factors that the extent to which that student's family is able to meet, predict a student's performance at school. In the following section of this chapter, I discuss the implications from my study findings as related to Henderson and Berla (1994) research findings.

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning.

In my survey results, parents' ratings for the quality of information provided about child development as statistically significant after attending family events at school. While not specifically addressed in my survey, it can be thought that a child's home environment better encourages learning when parents receive specific information about their child's development. In other words, more knowledgeable parents can better encourage their children learning at home.

2. Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers.

The survey results showed an increase in satisfaction in all areas: communication, general satisfaction and parent involvement. Providing opportunities for parents to grow and learn while making connections with their peers encouraged them to expand their expectations for their child(ren), and possibly encouraged them to set realistic expectations for them. Parents learned from other parents to better understand their own children and expectations for them through conversation and observation.

3. Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

The school benefits because data showed that when parents become involved, they continue to stay involved (Karakus & Savas, 2012). Schools that actively involve parents and the community tend to establish better reputations in the community, experience better community support, and school programs that encourage and involve parents usually do better and have higher quality programs than programs that do not involve parents (Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

When schools have a high percentage of involved parents in and out of schools, teachers and principals are more likely to experience higher morale, teachers and principals often earn greater respect for their profession from the parents, and consistent parent involvement leads to improved communication and relations between parents, teachers, and administrators (Olsen, 2008).

Children will benefit from increased parent involvement and satisfaction because these children tend to achieve better grades, attend school more regularly, consistently complete homework, and have better self-esteem (Olsen, 2008).

Implications

Findings from this study can impact how teachers communicate with families as well as structure how they provide activities and opportunities for parent communities to grow and develop. For instance, parents indicated increased communication throughout the planned family events at school.

This research revealed the importance for preschool programs to provide opportunities for parents and family members to connect and develop relationship outside of their own relationship with their child. It is possible that facilitating and nurturing these relationships will in turn encourage families to become more involved in their child's school, therefore increasing overall satisfaction.

Study Limitations

A number of limitations in this study merit consideration. The multiple aspects of involvement were nowhere near exhaustive within the constraints of a Master's research project. Given that this sample was already relatively involved, the results could possibly be generalized to a middle-class, involved group and may be less applicable to different groups.

Another limitation includes the relatively small sample size, as the study contained limited number of families in the program. Other limitations included family backgrounds and experiences, family size as well as that all participants are part of a catholic school community. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to public schools.

This survey was given to the preschool families without collecting demographic data or assigning each survey a number in order to track the pre- and post-surveys. This is a

definite limitation as the researcher was unable to provide specific findings regarding each of the participants.

Next Steps in Research

It is recommended that future research be conducted at different schools and compare the results to check validity of results. Many larger, public schools with preschool programs have long running parent involvement aspects to their programs. It would be valuable to conduct this research in an already established program with a parent component.

It is important for research to continue in the area of building parent community within the early childhood preschool setting. I believe that taking the time to provide meaningful opportunities for families to connect not only increases overall satisfaction, but also encourages parents to become more involved in their child's education. In addition, further research could be completed to survey a more diverse sample and collect data for a longer period of time. While designing this type of study is challenging, even a series of small interventions could demonstrate important outcomes. These outcomes could then provide valuable feedback to improve general satisfaction, parent involvement and communication within the school system. In addition, these findings could be helpful with program design for those schools looking to expand their preschool program by supporting increased parent involvement in their child's schooling.

Conclusions

There are many ways parents benefit by becoming more involved in their child's education including becoming more responsive and sensitive to their children's social, emotional, and intellectual developmental needs (Olsen, 2008). The findings from this survey

research project suggested that teacher effort in planning family activities combined with family effort in attending and participating in family activities improved parental satisfaction and involvement in their child's preschool program. In fact, given that data were collected over six weeks, parental satisfaction and involvement improved relatively quickly. This is especially important to note, as setting the practice of involvement at the preschool level is beneficial for the entire school community. After all, preschool sets the stage for strong partnership across family and between families and schools (Kreider, 2002).

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Appendix A: Cover Letter to Participants

Dear Survey Participants,

I am in the process of completing my Master's degree at St. Cloud State University. As a part of my thesis, I am conducting research on the topic of building parent community. I would like your input on this topic to assist me in conducting my research. Please complete the attached survey and return it in the enclosed envelope. I would appreciate your willingness to assist me by completing this brief survey. Please complete the survey within the next 5 days. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Karin Erickson-Thoemke

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate

Building Parent Community

You are invited to participate in a research study about building parent communities within a preschool program and whether or not it will increase parent satisfaction and parent involvement. You were selected as a participant because you currently have a 3-4-5 year old currently enrolled at St. Katharine Drexel School. This research project is being conducted by Karin Erickson-Thoemke to satisfy the requirements of a Master's Degree in Child Family Studies at St. Cloud State University

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to you will be asked to complete two surveys, one prior intervention to gather current satisfaction and involvement rates, and another survey at the end of the project to gather data showing any change in satisfaction and involvement. The data will remain confidential. It is important to have as many people as possible complete and turn in this survey to compile an accurate representation.

The purpose of this study is to build parent community and gain current parents of 3-4-5 year old students' perceptions on the level of satisfaction and involvement, provide several interventions, and survey parents after six weeks to gather data showing any change in involvement and satisfaction.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

There are no benefits to the survey participants.

Data collected will remain confidential. To keep information confidential, data will be reported and presented in aggregate (group) form or with no more than two descriptors presented together.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Karin Erickson-Thoemke at erka0601@stcloudstate.edu, or Dr. Jane Minnema, at jeminnema@stcloudstate.edu. Results of the study can be requested from the researcher and can also be found at the St. Cloud State University Repository.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate.

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

St. Katharine Drexel Preschool Parent Satisfaction Survey

We, at SKD Preschool, appreciate the confidence and trust you place in us to educate your child/children. As partners in the education for your child/children, your opinion can help us provide the best possible experience for you and your child/children. Please complete this survey and send it back to school with your child in the enclosed envelope. Thank you.

General Satisfaction

Please check your response in the box below:

- 1). How satisfied are you with the number of opportunities provided to get to know other parents in your child's class?

Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Always Satisfied

- 2). How satisfied are you with the opportunities available for family involvement (events, education opportunities, resources)?

Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Always Satisfied

- 3). Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of your child's preschool education?

Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Always Satisfied

- 4). How satisfied are you with your sense of connectedness at St Katharine Drexel School?

Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Always Satisfied

Communication

Please check your response in the box below:

- 1). How well does the classroom newsletter fill your need for communication about upcoming activities?

Not At All Well	Sometimes Not Well	Usually Well	Always Well

- 2). How well does the school email process work for your family?

Not At All Well	Sometimes Not Well	Usually Well	Always Well

- 3). How well does St Katharine Drexel School address your questions in a timely manner?

Not At All Well	Sometimes Not Well	Usually Well	Always Well

- 4). How well do teachers communicate with you regarding your child's development?

Not At All Well	Sometimes Not Well	Usually Well	Always Well

Parent Involvement

Please check your response in the box below:

- 1). How often are you welcomed upon entering the school?

Never	Once in a While	Usually	Always

- 2). How often do you engage with other parents from your child's class?

Never	Once in a While	Usually	Always

- 3). In the past school year, how often have you helped out at your child's school?

Never	Once in a While	Usually	Always

- 4). How often have you participated in child friendly family activities occurring in your community?

Never	Once in a While	Usually	Always