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Empowering Parents to Support their Children to Survive and Thrive in School: A Present-Day Challenge

Abstract

This paper accentuated the importance of the availability of suitable programs to train parents to support their children to survive and thrive in school. Parents have a role to play in supporting their children to fully benefit from their education. Parents should set a positive home environment to support the learning of children. It was also indicated that the training needs of the parents can be described and used as topics for the modules of a training program as part of non-formal education. It was also explained that the program should be delivered in the format of distance education by using e-training platform to deliver the programs in an attainable, sustainable and affordable manner.

Keywords: empowerment of parents, training of parents, training needs of parents, training needs of parents, nature of training programs for parents, delivering of training programs

Introduction

It is generally accepted that parents should be intensely involved in the lives of their children, for example in the aspects of caring, nurturing, socialization, discipline, protection and also the individual child's education (Ronaasen, 2014, p. 157). However, it was found that parental involvement does not realize to the full meaning of partnerships in education. Thus, it is obvious successfully accept their responsibility amongst the different partners in the provisioning of education and to play their roles in supporting their children to survive and thrive in school (Xaba, 2015, p. 197; Epstein, 2011, p. 46).

The challenge

Effective teaching-and-learning of learners, especially on the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, is dependent on the successful interaction of the partnership, namely the learners, the teaching fraternity and the parents. It is conspicuous that the national education system takes responsibility for preparing and training of two members of the partnership, namely the learners and the teaching fraternity. The focus is naturally on the learners, for example, by supporting them, for example, with curricula, teaching facilities and support services.

However, strangely enough, no support is given, on a formal or informal basis, to the parents to support their children in education. The reason is probably ignorance and a lack of knowledge on the side of officials in the national education. Xaba (2015, p.

197) concluded that parental involvement does not realize to the full meaning of partnerships in education.

Therefore, the present-day challenge is to find means to effectively train parents in an attainable, sustainable and affordable manner in order to empower them to support their children to survive and thrive in school.

The importance of parental involvement in the education of their children

The participation of parents contributes to the improved school and academic successes and performance of their children. The role of parents can be broadly divided in two sections, firstly the role of parents at home and secondly the role that parents play to ensure the effective functioning of the school. Regarding the support by parents to their children at home, it is emphasized that real-life experiences and settings are important for learning, for example, in literacy learning. It is accepted that social-emotional competencies of the children are as important as cognitive and academic competencies. Children of empowered parents are better prepared to achieve in school (Ball, 2014, p. 98).

Empowering parents to successfully support their children: The training needs of the parents

Assist parents to support children on an emotional, intellectual and physical level

It is accepted that the most important relationships of young children, especially in preschool and primary school, are with their parents, family, peers and friends. These relationships focus on key aspects, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Von Salisch, 2001, p. 311; Koivula & Huttunen, 2018, p. 178). The social-emotional development shows a rapid development between the ages of 5 and 12 and thus requires constant interaction by the parents to guide the development to a healthy and balanced self-understanding and self-image by the child (Von Salisch, 2001, pp. 310-311).

Parents have to understand how the relationship between parents and children can influence success in education

Parents are considered to be their children's first and best teachers. However, parents do not necessarily teach their children how to do Mathematics, but they should teach their children, for example, how to behave, how to interact with other people, which are good and which are bad habits and to have respect for other people, and this should be done by means of direct teaching as well as by intended and unintended example. Children must experience positive support at home, as they should also obtain positive learning conditions at home that allow them to achieve educationally according to their individual potentials. Parents are also responsible for laying a solid foundation, for example: to promote positive family values, to help the children to function within a pre-determined disciplined environment and to project positive attitudes and behavior regarding and about schooling (DBE, 2017, pp. 8-10).

Parents should understand how their children learn

Parents play an important role in supporting their children to learn successfully and to enjoy learning. Parents should understand how children learn and thus to ensure that

they set the correct example and that they foster and develop a rich learning environment at home. Areas of development can be identified where parents can play role, namely regarding the cognitive development, the socio-cultural development, the physical development and the mental development of the children (Redding, 2000, p. 20).

Parents should help their children to choose and manage their extracurricular programs

Extracurricular activities are typically defined as those activities that are not an integral part of the standard academic curriculum of a school. Although it is difficult to link extracurricular activities directly to academic success, it is generally accepted that well-chosen activities will add value regarding depth and outcomes of a person's academic accomplishments (Roopesh, 2018, p. 289). Parents should assist children to choose correctly which extracurricular activities to choose.

The role of parents to motivate their children to perform in a balanced way

Parents should motivate their children to perform in a balanced way regarding academic achievements in school and, for example, regarding achievements in other activities such as sports and cultural activities. Self-concept of ability influences motivation levels and is closely related to the level of self-worth which also influences one's willingness to try. Motivation includes extrinsic motivation, the availability of external rewards and intrinsic motivation, the 'pleasure' to complete a task successfully. Lastly it is important to help the child to achieve according to his/her own potential and not to only attach achievement to external motivation (Watts et al., 2004, pp. 16-17).

Parents should help their children to cope with pressure in school and in education

Pressure or stress in life can be explained as the emotional or physical reaction of an individual's body to a challenge or demand. Human pressure can have significant negative or positive effects on the performance of people. Parents cannot prevent their children from feeling stressed, but they can help their children to cope with it. Several reasons for stress can be listed, but it is true that a small amount of stress can be beneficial, but large amounts of stress can be unhealthy (Maykel et al., 2018, p. 31).

A good remedy for stress is to acquire the attitude of resilience. Resilience can be defined as the inherent ability to succeed in the face of challenges that occur in school and everyday life. It appears as if resilient people have several psychosocial resources, such as stronger intellectual functioning, parental availability, parental well-being, and more optimistic self-concepts. In the case of children it seems that their positive relationships with trusted adults, especially their parents, are essential (Goldstein & Brooks, 2012, pp. 2, 9, 10, 11).

Parents have to know that the personal relationship with their child's teacher and the school's management team support success in education

It was proven by research that children's academic performance, social skills and emotional wellbeing have improved if their parents have a good relationship with their teachers. It is being recommended that this relationship should be that of a partnership. It is also indicated that this partnership between parents and schools can be understood regarding three different characteristics, namely firstly the separate responsibilities,

secondly the shared responsibilities and thirdly their sequential or follow-on responsibilities (Epstein, 2011, pp. 4, 26). Although in general teachers welcome the parental involvement of the parents, it is important that each of the parties keep to their field of responsibility and that parents do not intrude in the professional space of the teachers (Deslandes et al., 2015, p. 132). A further pre-condition is that parents should be convinced that the school's teachers and management have the best interest of the children at heart will fully attempt to ensure the education success of their children. Schools will also expect the full buy-in and cooperation of the parents in a physical as well as financial manner (Jasis, 2021, p. 104).

Parents should support their children to deal successfully with bullying in school

Bullying or victimization of a child can be generally explained as a child that is being bullied when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions executed by one or more of their peers. Bullying is usually characterized by three criteria, namely it is aggressive behavior with the aim of intentional harming to the victim and it is carried out repeatedly and over time and it occurs in an interpersonal manner. A unique characteristic of the typical bullies is their aggression towards their peers with little empathy to the victims of bullying. It is characterized by a power imbalance. Several actions exist to combat the bullying of children, but one that is important to parents is to create a home and school environment that is characterized by warmth and trust and the firm rejection of this unacceptable behavior by all involved (Harcourt et al., 2014).

Single parents should learn how to handle the unique challenges regarding their children in relation to education

Several research studies point clearly to the fact that the academic achievement of children from single parent households usually tend to decline when one parent leaves the family on a permanent basis, either by death or by divorce. The main reason could be a reduction in the family's situation regarding finances and/or of social support (De Lange et al., 2014, p. 330). It was also found that children from single parent households had more trouble to complete their homework, may have more behavioral issues and tend to drop out of school on an earlier age than children for two-parent homes (Epstein, 2011, p. 187).

Parents should have a thorough knowledge about the education system.

The overarching aim of the national education system is to provide in the differentiated educational needs of the citizens. In the education system several features and elements are available to assist the citizens to reach this aim (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2014, p. 55). The parents should use the guidelines and frameworks of the education policy to provide their children with ample opportunities to prepare themselves for their different roles in life. Secondly the education managers and functionaries are available on the different levels of the education system to support and guide the parents, also regarding the funding of education. In the national education system several education career paths, on the different education levels, are provided that learners can access to complete their education. Several services are also provided to support the individual learners, for example, orthopedagogic services, career

orientation services, transport services as well as medical and dentistry services (De Beer et al., 2022, p. 11).

Training programmes to support the empowerment of parents

The quality teaching-and-learning of children depends on the quality inputs by the three partners, namely the learners, the teaching fraternity and the parents. Ample opportunities, structures and infrastructure are provided in the education to ensure quality of services to the learners and to enable and empower the teacher fraternity to deliver quality services. However, very little is being done to support the third party involved to ensure that children can learn successfully, namely the parents, to execute their responsibilities in a successful manner. Nowhere in the education system provision is being made to empower the parents to acquire the required competencies as they need to successfully support their children.

To provide in the training needs of parents, as it was explained above, attainable, sustainable and affordable training programs are urgently needed to enable the parents to support their children in education. A few programmes for parent-training are available at some schools, but it is clearly not enough of number of sufficient qualities, particularly in South Africa. However, it is clear that the acquisition of these competencies will without contribute to learning and academic success of their children.

It is proposed that the characteristics of the training programmes should include at least the following, namely it should provide flexibility in following the programme, it should provide sufficient opportunities to engage with the parents, it should develop strong communication competencies of the parents, and it should show empathy with the difficult responsibilities of parents (Ronaasen, 2014, p. 174). The content of such training programs should be based on the training needs of teachers as it is being described above.

Delivery of the programme

The use of cluster-based forums and parent interest-groups are often recommended as delivery method (Xaba, 2015, p. 197), but it only realize in minimal manner. Therefore, educators and parents prefer e-technology based training, because the parents can engage with the programmes when and where it suits them (Thomson & Carlson, 2017, p. 425). The programs should be delivered by means of distance education programs. The programs should also be part of non-formal education because no 'academic' entrance requirements can be requested, but some kind of qualification should be provided to recognise the effort. Finally, the training program should consist of separate modules, each covering a particular topic, from which the parents can choose according to their own context and training needs. Each of the training needs as discussed above can be used as a topic of a separate module.

Several e-training platforms exist of which the Training-Apps (T-Apps) platform of Education Expert is an example. It was proven that the use of the T-Apps support was experienced very positively by the students and that they were convinced that it positively supports their learning experiences and achievements. It can be concluded that the use of the T-Apps has made a positive contribution to the learning success of students. The students are of the opinion that the T-Apps can contribute to improvement in teaching. Finally, an important finding was that the use of the T-Apps

supports independent learning and cooperative teaching-and-learning amongst the students. The conclusion is that the T-Apps can be used to deliver the training programs of parents in an attainable, sustainable and affordable manner (Steyn & Gerber, 2011).

Differentiation in the programme nature and contents

Several research findings suggest that programmes for parent empowerment should operate differently for parents of various backgrounds. It is recognized that the family background in the children's educational experiences should be recognized. The nature and content of the training programmes should be differentiated according to the various contexts of the parents (Kim et al., 2018, p. 175). The programmes should also be built on the principles of 'do it yourself' and 'doing it for ourselves together' (Xaba, 2015, p. 197). These principles simultaneously implied the importance of self-regulated learning and participation in active learning.

Conclusion

This paper accentuated the importance of the availability of suitable training programs to assist parents to acquire the required competencies to support their children to survive and thrive in school. It was indicated that parents have a role to play in supporting their children to fully benefit from their education. Parents should set a positive home environment to support the learning of children. It was also indicated that the training needs of the parents can be identified and described to be used as topics for the modules of a training program as part of non-formal education. It was also explained that the program should be delivered in the format of distance education and that e-training platform are available to deliver such programs in an attainable, sustainable and affordable manner.

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