

THE NECESSITY OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM PLANNING AND PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

There are various opinions concerning the participants in curriculum preparation. According to the experts, the role of three groups are basic in this regard: the domination of university experts; the domination of the experts familiar with the environment; and symmetrical and harmonious participation. This paper deals with the reasons for parental participation, and the level and the significance of their participation in curriculum planning. It is concluded that parents' involvement in curriculum planning is essential, and it should be of high consideration. However, it seems even in the developed countries, where their governments have explicitly declared that parents' involvement is somehow obligatory and their legislators have passed some acts in this respect, parental involvement is indeed in helping the school staff, and not in curriculum planning.

Keywords: Curriculum, curriculum preparation, curriculum planning, participants, parents

INTRODUCTION

All those who are somehow engaged in educational affairs have normally thought about the material of curriculum. Yet, most people think that curriculum is the careful study of those beneficiaries engaged in curriculum planning, their impulses and preferences as well as expectations. They think that not only the desires and interests of different individuals and groups are effective on curriculum planning but also on the specific educational environment where the curriculum will be carried out. In some places, there are positive relationships dominant among the participants, resulting in useful thoughts and constructive decisions; while in some other places, restriction, contradiction and conflict are dominant.

Man has gained profit from different management methods in education since the early days of instruction and training, but since new social transitions has created some changes in different aspects of societies and in information and communication technology, some new requirements and necessities have appeared. As such, in order to observe this new requirements, some changes in school management methods and some attempts in improving school management qualities seem necessary. One aspect of this change and improvement should deal with those participating in curriculum planning. Generally, participation in programs leads to enhancement of efficiency at work, as well as unity and increase of confidence among people.

Of course, participation should be conducted by the organization directors in order to lead to a good programming process and to the necessary effectiveness. During the planning process, there should be participation in both preparation and performance, else opposition, disappointment, conflict and resistance against the curriculum performance will be increased (Keramati 2007).

Parents' participation in school affairs is to be differentiated and categorized from various aspects. The most important kinds of participation include imposed, voluntary, conscious,

unconscious, one dimensional, and multidimensional participation. Only conscious, voluntary and multidimensional participations are of real value in the long term. The real and serious parental participation in social and educational affairs finds its real meaning only when there is the best interrelationship, amity, confidence, communion and cordiality between the parents and preceptors (Arabshahrab & Saleki, 2010).

Parents' participation in curriculum affects on the success rate and educational progress of students, and hence on the efficiency of the school. It should be considered that schools principals' use of participation management method and their value for parents' suggestions, comments and participation in curriculum results in the increase of educational effectiveness and efficiency rate. In this study, parents' participation level in curriculum, its significance as well as for and pros views in this respect will be reviewed. Then it will be clarified whether real and actual parental participation in curriculum planning is in progress in schools or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of experts look positively at parents' participation in school curriculum (Falen, 1991; Halford, 1996; Lambert, 2003; Maclur & Walker, 2000; Reeves, 2004), while some others look negatively at it (McLaughlin, 1993; Woods, 1988). Bryklee & Smith (1990), in this regard, have stated "Parents possess skills, habits and interests that can enrich curriculum much more; it is of no importance how much their children's teachers talented are." In contrast, Fine (1993, pp. 682-83) believes that "Parents enter into the general educational field powerless and without any source. They are not usually welcomed by the school authorities and are not allowed to have a share in important and vital affairs in respect to educational structure revision." Also, Arnold's (1998) research results have revealed that the success of parents' participation programs in schools depends on school principals' beliefs, decision makings, and skills in establishing a strong and helpful relationship (Cited by Arabshahrab and Saleki (2010).

Gronn (2003), Reynold & et.al (2002) concluded in their studies that the schools using participation method in their school management strengthen the schools functions. In contrast, Geller & et. al (2003) found out that participation and cooperation of people in school affairs has no effects on the school affairs improvement. Mensah (2011) in his study, "Participation Effects and the Cooperation of People in Education and Training" concluded that the characteristics and features of people participating in schools have been the main challenge of cooperation in schools, and people's common characteristics are the main and effective factors of the cooperation between the individuals, education and training. On the other side, Thapa (2013) revealed in a study that there is no use in transferring ordinary schools into schools with participation method, and that the affairs submitted to schools as well as the role of the board in schools should go through another revision once again.

DISCUSSION

Parental participation in school affairs has found its significance as education has become more and more significant nowadays. However, there are a great deal of problems in practice, as there are various notions on the whole matter in general, and on the extent of this participation, in specific. As such the present study attempts to look at the matter from different opinions dominant in the field and to see what kind of participation is achieved, if it is, what is missing in this participation.

Undoubtedly, active participation has positive effects for parents as it results in creation of basic mental benefit so that they can help their children learn better. This causes the schools to be engaged with social life much more completely. This notion signifies that parents should be promoted to participate in curriculum planning more actively. Kazlu (2001, in a

study, proved that school based decisions on the basis of teachers, parents, managers and social group members' participation have a great deal of effects on the improvement of students' learning environment.

Instructors' different opinions have resulted in various views concerning parental participation or non-participation. Chart 1 shows seven levels of parental participation which include the highest effective level of activity (received reports about children's progress) to the least one (decision making).

Chart 1: Parents' participation levels in schools (Lambert, 2003; Reeves, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; cited by Marsh & Willis, 2007)

1. Received reports about children's progress

- Advertisements at home
- Report cards
- Phone calls
- Appointments at home
- Teachers' conferences with parents

2. Involvement of parents in specific events

- Mass entertainment
- Working days(dedicated to cleaning and repair of buildings and fields)
- Plays, dramas and concerts, scientific festivals
- Councils
- Days of public celebrities
- Parents' night clubs

3. Capital increase

- Marketing, sale of presents offered to the church for charity affairs
- Walking to collect money

4. Active participation in educational activities

- Daily instruction for parents
- Seminars on specific subjects
- Class observations

5. Cooperation in non-official activities

- Organizing daily exercising and test nights
- Controlling students in land travels
- Connecting with local agencies about working experience situations for students
- Research on library subjects
- Providing non-educational preparation

6. Cooperation with teachers in teaching

- Teacher skills (like pottery, basketball)
- Talking to guests
- Controlling school travels
- Preparing teaching materials
- Protecting students' patent

7. Decision Making

- Selecting volunteers for teaching situations
- Consults or meetings with curriculum committees

These levels have been designed on the basis of writers such as Lambert, 2003; Reeves, 2004; and Epstein & Salinas, 2004. Generally, these writers have agreed that satisfaction with parents' participation has moved from potential level to the active one (Cited by Marsh & Willis, 2007).

The first and the most potential level of parents' participation indicates that the teacher knows better than anybody and that the parents did not pay any attention to their children's progress. Talks between teachers and parents provide chances to the parents to ask their questions. Face to face meetings are useful for both the teachers and the parents, but a few parents use such chances because they are busy with their own daily affairs. Teachers often explain for the parents that they need to meet each other more.

The second level of parents' participation in schools has been designed for special matters. Such matters enable parents to observe the specific skills (daily exercises, art works) that children have achieved. They provide social chances for the teachers and the parents to meet each other. These meetings help to create a positive relationship between the two sides.

The third level of participation is related to school expenses payment; that is, a traditional and meaningful work which often takes place by the interaction between the teachers, the parents and communities. The expenses are often related to book purchase, exercise or computer equipment. If the parents are assured that the collected incomes will be spent on useful sources for their children, they are generally very much eager to participate in such programs like book fairs and their purchase.

The next level requiring parents' participation is considered specialized. They may participate in seminars and workshops on subjects such as review of values, general education and math skills. These activities can provide useful hints for the parents to understand the teachers' viewpoints as well as other materials. Here they can directly observe their children's gaining experience, and to learn how they may solve a lot of their daily problems.

The fifth and sixth phases of parents' participation can help the teachers plan curriculum. In fact, with assigning enough time and providing a better chance, they can work as consultants for the teachers. At the opening days of primary schools, parents often try to read stories for small groups of children, and to participate in art and entertainment works. Parents can function as tutors at home to develop the performed teaching at school. By doing such works, parents can help teachers in non-educational activities (Fifth level, and then arrive at higher educational levels (Sixth level). As a matter of fact, they create a vast scope of skills that function as a preparatory ground to lead the students in the curriculum. Moreover, changes in staff's pattern enable parents to do such tasks. For instance, Low (1986) introduces a high school where 18 parents taught math, art, literature, tennis, job skills, social studies, etc. for a day in a week (Cited by Marsh & Willis, 2007).

The seventh and the most active form of participation is to make decisions for schools.

In some areas, parents can be in touch with school committees in order to test job applicants or to choose the curriculum. The most effective way of participating parents directly in decision making is to admit them as members of school committees or councils (Cited by Marsh & Willis, 2007).

Leadership is necessary for an organization to stay in success. Even the best employees need to know how they can participate in leading the organization to arrive at his goals (Cho & Tsang, 2009). Studies have shown that managers' leadership methods are of effective factors in increasing effectiveness, efficiency and interest of organizations (Mesdagrad, 2005; Frank et.al, 1982; Choik Foong, 2001).

In today's organizations there is much need for employees' participation in organization management. In fact, transformation of management styles from autocratic mode to participatory management results in employees' group participation and the formation of co-workers groups, and hence, in effective, efficient, organized and harmonious performance of the work (San Juan, 1998). According to Loot's (2001) findings, educational managers consider the role of communication, creation of constant changes and transformation in the process of communication between parents and institutes, paying attention to non-official relationships, and creation of trust and certainty between parents and school officials as the effective factors in attracting parents' participation in schools (Cited by Arabshahrab and Saleki, 2010).

In spite of the benefits inherent in parental participation and in spite of the above discussed points related to the necessity of managerial method transformations in schools and educational institutes, there are some hindrances in parental participation path. The parents themselves have been to schools as students for some years, yet when they go to their children's schools, they are worried and feel frustrated and think they have little understanding of the school affairs. McTaggart (1984, p.12) reminds us that "parents' understanding of what happens in schools is usually limited to solving the educational problems that the media present. Such perceptions are both imperfect and contrastive." Such an occasion is especially difficult for the parents with low economic and social status, and those belonging to racial minorities (Epstein and Salinas, 2004; Jackson and Copper, 1989; Maclor and Walker, 2000). People need to be promoted, led and supported in order to be involved with school personnel. They need to feel assured, and to feel that there is not very much great dangers (Crozier, 1997).

Most of parents believe that the language of the instructors and specially teachers is vague. The teachers, as a necessary part of their own learning, are engaged with educational courses, so they use professional language when talking. Mostly, they do not care if an ordinary individual does not understand him. That is why the only common tendency between the teachers and the parents is to limit their talks to commonplace subjects (Fowler & Corley, 1996; Kenway, Alderson & Grundy, 1982). To remove the barriers between the teachers and the parents possibly requires some time.

Few parents volunteer to participate in school activities fast (Aronson, 1996). Yet, most of the time, their expectations from the teachers are different, even sometimes unbelievable, in respect to what the teachers can do for their children. From the other side, most of the teachers prefer not to go to detail in explaining their own method of teaching to the parents, and they still expect the parents help them in their own responsibilities by asking their children to do their homework. Even they expect the parents to make their children behave their teachers as authorities who are worthy of respect (Hartley & Owen, 1986; Lareau, 1986). The education of the teachers is also much concentrated on the art of teaching. Most of pre-service trainings are dedicated to the ways of teaching, but a limited number of these trainings contain some courses in which the ways of interaction with parents or the ways of understanding their attitudes, motives and frustrations are dealt with. Therefore, most of teachers have little knowledge of such tasks, and they have not been concerned about how to provoke the parents to participate actively in schools or help their children learn.

Lareau (1986) believes that the teachers and the parents' approach to education varies completely. The teachers have a general and absolute approach because they try to apply the same criteria for all the students, while the parents have a limited approach as they are concerned with their children's prosperity and happiness (Lasky, 2000). Yet, Hoover-Dempsey, Basler & Brissie (1987) believe that such differences are removed if both the teachers and the parents consider how they can be useful in the children's education.

In 1993, California passed a law in which made it an obligation for new teachers to work actively with parents. Nowadays, teacher training institutes assign some parts of their programs to the followings:

1. creation of communication skills for new teachers so that they can talk with the parents.
2. teaching the teachers how to engage the parents in their children's home work.
3. making the teachers familiar with methods of connecting home culture with the education at schools (Hiatt-Michael, 2000).

Furthermore, Michigan also passed some Acts since the last decades of the 20th century regarding parental involvement in school life, and the last Act is Act No. 107 of Public Acts of 2004, approved by the Governor in May 20, 2004. The Michigan Department of Education takes steps in implementation of the mentioned Act, and recommends all school districts develop a Family Involvement Plan. The State Board of Education states that "when parents are involved in the children's education, the attitudes, behaviors, and achievement of students are positively enhanced" (Michigan Department of education Booklet, p. 5)

Although the performed actions in development of parental participation during the last decades have progressed, some instructors do not still accept the parents' attendances. Also, some parents do not agree with close relationship with the teachers in respect to their interferences (Jahanian & Beladinejad, 2012).

According to Helinger's (2001) findings, friendly and informal relation between the parents and the school officials, information announcement to the parents, and creation of warm and pleasing environment at schools are considered desirable methods for increasing parental involvement (Cited by Arabshahrab & Saleki, 2010).

While it is not obvious if there is certain and clear tendency toward parental participation in educational decision makings or not now, in the process of curriculum planning, new ideas have appeared and new paths have been discovered. The leader of a school curriculum project, whether the school head, the teacher, or etc. should know that unexpected matters are a potential source of failure for the participants, and should help them understand that such unexpected matters may be created. The job of this leader is to ease the cooperation between the members, not to insist on the specific results that should be gained (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992).

When an educational group begins the planning of curriculum, they are confronted with the problem of finding a source of help in gaining the necessary skills, information and financial help. They have to find those who possess such qualities and are willing to help. Of course, not only are there individuals, but also state and private organizations that can help with curriculum planning. With asking for help from external creative individuals and organizations, curriculum group can overcome a lot of problems (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004).

However, the main problem in deciding what should be taught to students remains in its ever-present condition, and parents are not actually engaged in curriculum development. It cannot be denied that all schools are means in the hands of the ruling system of each country,

whether state run schools or private ones. As such, especially when the courses and their materials are concerned with humanities, all that is taught is to make real subjects out of children. Here, the main purpose of school authorities and contents is to lead the students toward being obedient to established ideas, traditions, customs, and conventions and to behave well. What the educational systems are after is to enhance the students' attitudes, behaviors and achievements, the points which are comprehensible in conducting them to become the desired individuals in the service of the ruling system. In such a situation, the question of involvement of parents in curriculum development is meaningless.

Actually, parental involvement in the life of school is just a means in the hands of the authorities, of the schools and the governments, to facilitate the schools in obtaining their final goals. Undoubtedly, in all societies, parental participation in school life is increasingly talked about nowadays because, in a sense, "the more opened, democratic and collaborative climate [at schools], the more teachers perceive self-efficacy", or because "school socialization improves common values, norms and citizenship skills" (Taylor, et al. 2004, p.166). Looked carefully at the words and expressions in these two quoted sentences, one cannot but understand that parental involvement is only a tool, a tool that its benefit is to enhance self-efficacy in the teachers to improve prevailing common values and norms, the norms and values which are needed to create real obedient subjects in the societies, and of course, the real subjects who should have digested citizenship skills throughout the long period of time that they have to spend in schools and later on in higher educational institutes.

Participation in the life of the schools is not only helping the school staff and children move toward their goals by their financial support or their attendance in school board meetings, or even in being familiar with their children's weaknesses and helping in strengthening them. These might be a part of parental participation. But if a real democratic climate is required at schools, a real participation of the parents is felt necessary in curriculum development. So far parents are not practically involved in curriculum development. In very rare cases and in very rare societies, they might be involved in deciding the contents of the curriculum when the content is related to enterprises and industries, but when it is the matter of humanities and social sciences, the choice of the contents becomes political as the social institutions and communities desire to create the ideal obedient individuals who follow their own communities as well as societies. Therefore, talking of parental involvement and democratic climate at schools is merely a propaganda unless sensible and real steps will be taken by the social and state institutions in real involvement of parents in real life of the schools.

CONCLUSION

The significance of parents' role is unconceivable in educating and training the future generation from aspects of family, environmental and geographical condition. Therefore, it seems necessary for parents to have a great share in participation in curriculum planning, but it requires its own lawful instruments which should be taken into account in educational rules and principles.

Of course, to make parental participation practical, some acts seem necessary. Media play an important role to reduce the anxiety and fear of attendance in school sessions in parents, and to create desire and tendency for participation. Even, it seems necessary to make parents realize the significance of their involvement in their children's education as even now, in some societies, parents seem uncertain of their role. Of course, the school boards can play a significant role in attracting the parents in such an involvement by well-timed announcements and providing proper and enough information. Besides, the instructors need more training in

understanding the importance of parental involvement in curriculum planning, how to behave and interact with parents.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that every group that is in charge of curriculum planning should overcome the problem of its political aspects. Yet, it should be confessed that the main customers' (the learners') satisfaction is only achievable through their participation in curriculum planning. Therefore, a linear approach, which tries to identify all the parameters of the process and fit them next to each other in the form of assembling in order to result in the best possible planning, is felt vacant in planning and development of curriculum.

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