

The child is not an empty being who owes whatever he knows to us who have filled him up with it. No, the child is the builder of man. There is no man existing who has not been formed by the child he once was.

– Maria Montessori

Editorial

***'By recognizing the roles of parents in their child's education and offering them support to reach those roles, staff members are communicating to parents that their role in their child's education is valued. By working together, staff and parents can create and maintain a high-quality educational program for children.'* – Joy Klepfer**

Where do parents belong – inside the class or outside? By giving them details of classroom transactions, will they start pushing the children and the teachers or will they support their children better? It is probably the individual teacher's prerogative to decide for his or her class. However, the following article gives the research of one set of teachers on the effect of parent involvement in enriching children's vocabulary.

Cooperative biliteracy: an effort among students, teachers and parents

The following article is based on the paper, Cooperative biliteracy: Parents, students and teachers read to transform' by Fernando Rodriguez-Valls of San Diego State University, USA.

Thousands of Latino men and women move from Mexico in search of a better future. Majority of their children learn to read and write in English Medium programs. The activities they carry out are neither enriched by their native culture nor linked to their mother tongue, Spanish. They fail to understand that the language they speak at home and the one they learn at school belong to the same concept: knowledge.

Research shows that using the culture and the first language of the students as a tool to construct the knowledge of the second language increases student performance. It also empowers parents as active participants in the learning process. Understanding the importance of developing an initiative to utilize this finding, two teachers of an elementary school in South Los Angeles conducted the program that is described next.

Throughout the year 2005 – 06, these teachers worked with 29 fourth grade children and their families. These children were struggling to read and write English. The teachers bought English and Spanish bilingual books and started a Reading Cooperative.

In the first month of the school year, the teachers talked to the parents in the only

What is expected of her [the adult/parent] is the ability to distinguish the child who has chosen the right path from the one that has erred, and she must be imperturbable, ready to be there whenever she is called in order to attest her love and confidence.

To always be there
– that is the point.

- From 'The Child in the Family'. Maria Montessori

common language, Spanish. The parents were concerned about the lack of progress of their children. One parent remarked, 'My son only listens, never talks at school'. In the process, the teachers found that reading was something done by children since the parents did not know English.

Aim of the second meeting was to promote connections between Spanish and English, model dialogic reading and to promote family participation. Of the 29 parents, 27 turned up. A picture book called *Hairs/ Pelitos* was selected because it discussed the kinds of hair each member of the family had.

In the first communal reading, the teachers, students and parents 'picture walked' through the book, sharing thoughts about the pictures, asking questions, drawing and labelling the drawings with words. Later, they sat in groups and read the first two pages of the book, helping each other. At the end, they met for a debriefing. One of the parents admitted, 'I like this project, I as a parent can learn with my child'. Then they took the books home to read the rest.

The participants met once a month. Once they became comfortable with the program, they linked the reading with classroom work and week end homework. When they began books with chapters and less illustrations, teachers led a discussion of the story before giving the book. One chapter was read during each week. On every Wednesday, children answered a short test of two multiple choice question and one inferential question.

Tests at the end of the year showed that children's performance improved with regard to reading and comprehension. More than that, it helped eradicate functional illiteracy. The previous image of parents and students as 'linguistic misfits' was replaced by a new vision of themselves.



Question for discussion

Can parents be involved in helping children learn? If yes, how?

Figure:
Assessment of children in Maya Chukkimane, each child sitting with the parent, teacher at the center

Contact us at iims.blr@gmail.com for your feedback. We also welcome any contributions – articles, pictures, anecdotes and events – for the next newsletter.