Parent Interview Reflection Paper
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Up until this semester, I was aware of the importance of family engagement and involvement in the school, but I did not fully understand the importance. Throughout the semester, Family and Community Partnerships has taught me a lot about the effects of family-school partnerships, the different ways that families and schools can include one another, different circumstances that influence a child’s behavior, the benefits of community involvement and much more. When I conducted my parent interview everything that I have read and learned in this class made more sense. Throughout this paper, I will discuss details of the interview and then use the interview responses as a way of reinforcing the knowledge that I gained from the course readings.

I conducted my interview with an employee at Viterbo who is the mother of a student in one of my field experience classes this semester. I will refer to this individual as Penny Leonard. The interview took place on Friday, November 22 at 10 am in Penny’s office at Viterbo. Throughout this semester, I have gotten to know Penny fairly well, making the atmosphere of this interview very comfortable. The interview lasted about thirty-five minutes and Penny provided detailed answers for each of the thirteen questions. I chose to interview Penny because I have witnessed how her children behave in school and I thought it would be interesting to see the connection to her point of view.

Penny’s views reinforced multiple points presented in the course readings, but the points that she supported the most had to do with teacher-communication efforts. Penny stated several times in the interview that “extra outreach and extra input are important to me…I want to reinforce what the teacher does as school, at home, so I appreciate when teachers communicate on a regular basis, outside of conference time” (P. Leonard, personal communication, November
22, 2013). This made a significant impact on me; it helped me realize how important consistent, honest communication is for both the parent and teacher. In a sense, Penny brought the information discussed in the course texts “to life.” Penny reinforced the information discussed in chapter ten of Kathy B. Grant and Julie A. Ray’s textbook *Home, School, and Community Collaboration: Culturally Responsive Family Engagement*, by discussing how important it was for her to be contacted about issues outside of formal conferences. Penny gave a few examples of times that she was contacted to have additional formal and informal conferences with teachers, and she stressed how appreciative she was that the teachers had reached out to contact her about information or issues regarding her child. She also discussed the difference that an informative e-mail or phone call about what her child is struggling with at school makes in her ability to help her child with homework.

Although Penny clearly exemplified a desire for consistent communication from teachers, it was really interesting to hear her empathy with teachers. Penny, who maintains a demanding job at Viterbo involving student academic success, demonstrated empathy for teachers when she stated, “Yes, the communication methods used by teachers work well for me; I would always love to see more, but I understand that they are busy…people probably wish I e-mailed more as well” (P. Leonard). Penny, a parent who holds a demanding job and still finds ways to be engaged and involved in her children’s school, is exactly the kind of parent I would like to have in my classroom.

Just this year, Penny has become an active member of the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) along with being involved in past activities such as assisting with recess duty, eating lunch at school with children, attending all conferences and going to parent/family nights. Due to Penny’s demanding position at Viterbo, she is unable to be involved in the classroom as
much as she would prefer, but she stated that she makes every effort possible to be involved in all other ways. She stated that she feels guilty that she cannot be as involved as some other parents, but she tries to make up for it by being a chaperone for field trips, taking part in fundraisers, and promoting PTA activities such as “Donuts for Dads” and “Muffins for Moms.”

Penny has expressed enjoyment for the times that she has been able to be engaged in school activities and has expressed appreciation for the activities when “the teachers have taken extra time to show up at the activities, such as the PTA fundraisers, as well” (P. Leonard). Both Penny and her husband work daytime jobs at universities, so they are unable to attend every in-school activity; therefore, they both participate in as many fundraisers and after-school activities as possible. After hearing and empathizing with Penny, my views changed a little bit in regards to family engagement in schools.

I realized that, as much as I hope to have many of my students’ parents involved in the classroom, not all will be able to be involved in in-school activities. I gained a better understanding of the working-parent perspective, realizing that involvement in after-school activities is just as important for the well being of my students. Not only did I learn about the parent perspective of involvement times, but I also learned a great deal about the general perspective of a parent. Penny opened my eyes to the real importance of communication by stating, “Communication is all about how and when; if you can keep me in the loop—that’s the biggest thing. If my child comes home and is not liking school, I want to know why; as well as what I can do to help change that” (P. Leonard).

Penny’s answers also reminded me that most parents also like to be informed of social and emotional behaviors, especially at the younger grades. Penny was appreciative as she recalled one teacher who did an excellent job of keeping her and her husband informed of their
child’s social interactions, how their child is viewed by other students, and issues that need to be addressed at home in terms of behavior and interactions. As stated several times in the course texts, teachers should also communicate to parents behavior concerns and they should not always be negative. Penny made me fully understand this concept when she said “I sometimes feel that social and emotional behavior and interactions are equally as important as academics, especially at a young age, so I want to know if there is more at home that could be done on the social part” (P. Leonard).

Throughout this paper, I have provided several examples of how Penny’s views have really helped me better understand the parent perspective of communication, as well as the importance of establishing and maintaining a good relationship with the parents. Conducting an interview with a parent, after reading the course texts about engagement, involvement, and management, was truly the best learning experience for me. At the beginning of the interview, Penny’s eyes watered as she told me how much it meant when a teacher called during his lunch break to see how her daughter was feeling after a few days of being sick. As the interview went on, I felt for the first time that I really understood what Penny was expressing and could take her feelings and input, as a parent, and gear it towards my efforts as a future educator.
References


Appendix

Question and Answer Items

*1. Describe the expectations you have for your child’s educator.

**1. Different level of expectations for ages; supportive of education experience; positive, encouraging, communication—likes when teacher called when student was sick-appreciated that; as far as education- (for 2nd grade) placate students’ strengths; downplay stuff she needs to work on; focus on strengths—teacher focused on negatives—that really bothered her. Wants to help out at home but wants a balance of positive and negatives- bring it out in a positive manner. Extra outreach is important; extra input from teacher. Communication about anything they see—even if outside of conference time. “Extra outreach and extra input are important to me…I want to reinforce what the teacher does as school, at home, so I appreciate when teachers communicate on a regular basis, outside of conference time”

*2. Describe the kinds of strategies used by your child's educators that are most helpful to your child.

**2. Thinks of things like math curriculum-older student had repetition, story problems, using counters,(different strategies for different concepts); approaching problems using different strategies to help students; multiple pathways on bringing in concepts. Spelling—teacher would use shaving cream to practice spelling words; make things interactive and active learning. Big believer in active learning; teacher had students take string to try and learn words; great for review at home. Appreciates multiple pathways & active learning; most interested in knowing how well a student understands and not as much memorization.

*3. How have you felt well informed by your child’s teacher?

**3. Mostly conferences—to be honest; likes newsletter idea—weekly just a quick preview/review, noticed it goes in spurts; hard to know what’s going on; nice to have e-mail,
letter, or short note sent home to be aware of what’s going on school. Also for discussion at home; doesn’t know if the communication is supposed to be on the student’s piece, but still feels there is a piece missing. Tries to e-mail teacher if needed.

**3.** Mostly conferences, but appreciates extra communication and the effort.

*4.** Describe the areas you feel you received "too much" information where you probably needed it least.

**4.** Appreciates all of communication; values extra information; feels that it is the one way she knows about many things going on. Math sheets have parent guide to help parents assist students with homework.

*5.** Describe the areas you feel your child's educator should have provided you with more information than he/she did.

**5.** Wants to see more about social interactions, one teacher has done an excellent job of talking about how child is viewed by other students. I sometimes feel it is equally important as academics, because that is really important at a young age; so I want to know if there is more at home that could be done on the social part? Middle-of-the-road—is there something that we should address at home in terms of behaviors/interactions.

*6.** Describe the kinds of efforts educators have made to establish a relationship with you.

**6.** Extra activities—family reading nights, Donuts for Dads, Muffins for Moms—teachers are part of those; teachers and principal help out. Interact with teachers at family reading night. Likes teachers being involved in after-school-hour activities. Doesn’t expect it all the time, but it is nice to see a good turn out.

*7.** Can you explain how your child's teacher included you in making important decisions regarding your child's education?
**7.** Child’s teacher called, informed, collaborative effort to try to figure out how to help learning disabilities; teacher provided a lot of extra activities; had parent-teacher-principal extra conference to help “solve” the problem. Thought the teachers did a good job of letting her know what was going on; figure out how to have parent help as well. Teacher-parent e-mails and notes back and forth.

**7.** Teacher’s seeking out to communicate & get extra interaction. Likes the outreach.

*8.** What kind of school activities are you involved in? Describe how you have been informed of any parent-teacher associations.

**8.** PTA- especially this year; past was when needing chaperones, volunteers; help out with special activities; go to every conference; had lunch at school with kids; playground duty; if looking for volunteers, typically help out in all activities. Take part in fundraisers themselves. Feels guilty about not being in the classroom—even with stressful job.

*9.** Describe what teachers have done to establish and maintain an effective team relationship with you.

**9.** Extra outreach—phone calls & e-mails

*10.a.** How often do you hear from teachers and school personnel and in what form of communication?

*10.b.** Do you feel that this method of communication is most effective for both you and the teacher/school?

**10.** Yes! Would like to see more of it, but totally understands why teachers have a hard time continuing education. “Teacher’s note in student’s assignment notebook, welcoming student back after being sick; called home when teacher called home when student was sick to see how she was doing.
11. Describe how conflicts with teachers have been effectively resolved.

Haven’t had any “conflicts” but isn’t crazy about one teacher who handles classroom differently than she is used to. Hard time at conference. Does do a good job of trying to transition students to being responsible. Not had any personal conflicts with teachers, principles, or any school personnel—if parents initiated outreach, teachers have been good about getting back to her on time.

12. What is the one thing that an educator can do to make your child's school and learning experience more positive?

Communication—all about how & when. IF you can keep “me” in the loop—that’s the biggest thing. If students comes home and is not liking school-she would do outreach and contact school about what is going on. Let me know what is going on in the classroom. Wants to support the teacher’s actions at home as well—so need to communicate.

13. Can you describe the best way that a teacher can support you as a student's parent?

Everything stated above. Trying to implement consequences at home for positive and negative and teacher was still giving full points for student having latework. Wanted her child to learn from mistakes and experiences so there should be consequences—teacher didn’t want to do it. Explained situation to teacher, teacher understood after a lot of explaining. If a parent comes in and expresses a concern, the educator should support that wish in whatever way it means for the school. Problem-solve and think, and collaborate what both sides can do to solve problems.