

US10 –EAD—822 Engaging Diverse Students & Families

***Home, School and Community Involvements in Improving  
Students' Learning and Developing***

Professor: Dr. Robinson

Student: Xin Wang

Date: August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

In the article *Connecting Home, School, and Community*, Joyce L. Epstein and Mavis G. Sanders claim that schools, families and communities share the goal of creating well rounded children to be positive citizens in our society. The shared ground between the three is defined as overlapping spheres of influence. The three institutions should be closely connected in order to improve the children's academic and personal learning performance, rather than letting one single group, such as schools, bear the full responsibility. Each group contributes to "create a coherent program to help students to succeed (p. 287)."

Epstein and Sanders suggest that there are six involvements: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (p. 289), that can effectively engage students and their families. Among the six forms of involvement, teachers play a crucial role in building a comprehensive connection between homes, schools and communities. This effective communication, according to Epstein and Sanders, is rooted in teachers' increasing involvement with students and their families rendering this practice "as important as or more important than family background variables for determining whether and how parents become involved in their children's education (p. 289)." In other words, Epstein and Sanders imply how decisive a teacher's role can be in engaging students and families with schools.

One suggestion from my previous teaching experience in China is having a dedicated website where parents can view updates on their children (pictures and videos of the students doing different activities, academic and social progress reports, behavioral updates). By building this website, parents can also interact with the educators, administrators and supporting staff (via

online message, email, webcam) at the times that are convenient for them. I noticed that by building the web bridge to communicate with families and students, the parents and teachers communicated much more frequently. As a result, we, as teachers, students, and families, had a much deeper and wider understanding of each other. Regardless of the families' social status or cultural values, the effective communication motivated the students to improve their learning performance in schools because of the increasing accountability they knew to expect from their families.

Meanwhile, communities can become involved in schools, as Epstein and Sanders propose, by sharing their talents in afterschool programs or elective classes (p. 292), such as public speaking, music, sports and art. For example, an international preschool I worked in cooperated with different community partners, such as fire departments and health care centers, and hosted a guest speaking activity. I noticed when the students were listening to a guest speaker they tended to be more engaged, and more eager to learn because the person was new, and the topic was fresh and fascinating to them. Thus, one of my approaches to integrating the community into schools is to encourage more guest speaking activities on different subjects. Another proposition is that schools can collaborate with communities to design activities and events to help integrate students' and their families' unique social, linguistic and cultural characteristics into the curriculum. Previously, I've found that one practical way to do so is to connect with art galleries, museums, laboratories and theaters to arrange various activities, such as field trips and workshops. Also, communities offering discounted or even free entry to the students and their families can provide incentives and opportunities for them to explore and observe diverse cultures. Such exploration eventually leads to the ultimate goal of living in the multicultural society with broad understanding and full respect.

In conclusion, the three contexts: schools, families and communities, are tied together because they are all centered on the student's learning and development. The stronger and tighter the connection between the three becomes, the better for the children's progress. In turn, the stronger and more well rounded children are, the more beneficial to the families, schools and the community. After all, in the circle of overlapping spheres of influence, no single element can succeed without others' positive involvements, and this, should be the fundamental understanding of the connection between the three.

#### *Reference*

- *Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M.G. (2000). Connecting home, school and community: New directions for social research. In M. Hallinan (Ed.), Handbook of sociology of education (pp. 285–306). New York: Plenum*