

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN DEALING WITH SCHOOL INDISCIPLINE

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Academic benefits of home-school link in terms of parental involvement in their children's schooling are well established (Epstein, 1987; Swap, 1993). In recent years, studies have also indicated positive impact when parents are consulted on children's discipline (Boulter, 2004; Guli, 2005). For example, the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation model, which requires school and teachers to work closely with parents, was highlighted as helping to reduce school indiscipline and truancy (Guli, 2005).

However, given the historically closed school ethos, with teachers viewing school matters as being their business – would they be responsive for greater parental involvement? School indiscipline is on the rise. School teachers viewed parents accountable and vice versa. Alternatively, school and parent share the responsibility and work together. Given the multicultural and complex school settings in Malaysia, some schools are well suited for comfortable school-home liaison such as the Felda Schemes schools where the community share similar backgrounds and live in a closed environment. Are the schools in the Felda Scheme responsive to the home-school link?

Objectives

This study examines school-home relationship among teachers and parents of secondary school students in Felda scheme settlements in three different states (Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak). The focus of the relationship was on parental involvement in discipline matters. The research objectives were:

1. To identify school practices regarding parental and community involvement in student discipline.
2. To identify parents and teachers' perception on parental cooperation with school especially on discipline matters.
3. To identify the expected roles of teachers and parents in discipline problems.
4. To identify the barriers to achieving cooperation; and
5. To develop school-home cooperation guidelines in dealing with students' discipline problems.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. What are the school practices regarding parental and community involvement in student discipline?
2. What are parents and teachers' perception on parental cooperation with school on discipline matters?
3. What are the expected teachers and parents' roles?
4. What are the barriers to parent-teacher cooperation?

The basis of the study is outlined by the interface relationships of three important groups (school, family and community) in a social system that co-exists interdependently and is mutually beneficial. As reported by Boulter (2004), "violence prevention is dependent upon family-school connections and family involvement in the school" (p. 10).

The study was conducted in three phases, namely: (i) a survey of 479 teachers in schools from three different states in West Malaysia; (ii) interviews with students, parents and teachers and (iii) an interactive workshop with parents, teachers, students and community representatives. Findings in earlier phases were clarified in the workshop.

Findings

Findings indicate that schools do carry out routine activities such as PTA meetings, annual sports event, report card day and other activities with limited parental involvement. Parent attendance was generally poor except during *maulidul-rasul* and *hajat* prayers. Suggestion of parental involvement in handling students' indiscipline in school received mixed reviews. Teachers, while seeing it as appropriate to parents' expected roles as guardians, however are quick to point out many supporting roles parents can help outside the school system such as teaching their children to master the basic skills taught in school and respecting school rules and regulations. Parents' lackluster attitude towards their children's education was raised by teachers as the greatest hurdle in building cooperation with parents. Nevertheless, teachers admitted that not staying in the vicinity and dealing with a large student population make it difficult for them to develop rapport with parents and the community. Parents and students interviewed reveal their unhappiness with the schools in particular with teachers who many felt were not friendly. Many parents felt that teachers should inform them personally regarding their children's misdeeds. From the students' perspective teachers were too quick to decide on their wrongdoings and in meting out punishment.

Clearly, student discipline problems are of concern to teachers, schools, parents and the students themselves. They all recognized the importance of cooperation. However, each group appears to focus on its particular agenda and concerns with little effort at collaborative problem solving. Common communal backgrounds do not necessarily augur well for better cooperation. In fact, there are greater expectations of camaraderie on the part of parents on teachers. Teachers on the other hand viewed parents' role basically as supporting them and the schools. A more meaningful participatory system of communication on discipline matters between the interested parties needs to be in place in schools. School policy on student discipline must be devised with community and parental input.

References

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