Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Parent, student and teacher beliefs about parental involvement in a child’s learning: a mixed method study

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Administration and Leadership) Massey University, New Zealand

Caroline Transom

2017
Abstract

Parental involvement in a child’s learning has a positive impact on a child’s academic success and emotional wellbeing, yet there are differing views about what this entails (Lewin & Luckin, 2010; Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011; Schnee & Bose, 2010). This study researched how parents, senior primary students and teachers in three New Zealand primary schools perceived ‘parental involvement in learning’ and the factors that influenced involvement. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was used so an understanding of the differing definitions could be gathered before they were explored in more depth in the qualitative stage of the study.

The findings of the study revealed that each group understood ‘learning’ differently and that these differences influenced their definitions of ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’. These definitions of learning shaped the actions teachers acknowledged, or valued as parental involvement, helping to create a teacher discourse of under involved parents that was not reflected in the parental data. Possible suggestions for practice and further research are explored in the study.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my supervisors Karen Anderson and Dr Jenny Poskitt for all their advice, guidance and patience on this journey. You understood my drive to make education better for our students and reminded me of this when times were challenging. I would also like to thank those principals, teachers, students and parents who participated in this study. Your openness and willingness to share your thoughts was much appreciated and your passion for the children involved was evident.

Secondly, I have to thank my school for supporting my successful application for a New Zealand study award. Special thanks must go to my principal Nick who encouraged professional learning in our school and always found time to discuss my study and research, despite the pressures of school that he was juggling at the time.

Next, I must acknowledge and thank Teach NZ for the study award to complete my thesis. This release from school allowed me to conduct this research in schools in a manner that would have been impossible if I was full time teaching. I have not been out of the classroom in fifteen years and this time was invaluable in deepening my theoretical understanding of these concepts.

Last, but definitely not least, a huge thank you to my family and friends. While studying for my Masters of Education all but my thesis has been completed while working full time. You have been there with coffees, calm down calls and practical help like editing whenever I needed it. The surprise study treats, and comments of support have made this possible and kept my motivation up till the end. Words are not enough to express how much I appreciate it!
# Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 1  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................. 2  
Contents .................................................................................................................................. 3  

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 9  
   1.1 Definitions of terms used .............................................................................................. 9  
   1.2 Why do this research? ................................................................................................. 9  
   1.3 Explanation of research conducted ............................................................................ 10  
   1.4 Outline of Thesis.......................................................................................................... 11  

2. Literature Review ............................................................................................................... 12  
   2.1 Background ................................................................................................................. 12  
      England.......................................................................................................................... 13  
      America ......................................................................................................................... 14  
      New Zealand .................................................................................................................. 14  
   2.2. Issues in research ....................................................................................................... 15  
   2.3 A shift towards ‘parental engagement in learning’ .................................................... 15  
      Possible model for a move towards engagement ........................................................... 16  
   2.4 School factors influencing parental involvement ....................................................... 17  
      The perfect box ............................................................................................................. 18  
      Invisible and visible parental actions ............................................................................ 19  
      Valuing ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’ ..................................................... 19  
      Power differential ......................................................................................................... 20  
      Language ....................................................................................................................... 21  
   2.5 Parental factors influencing parental involvement ..................................................... 23  
      Social Capital ................................................................................................................. 23  
      Life conditions ............................................................................................................. 24  
      Structural racism .......................................................................................................... 24  
      Parental role construction and feelings of self-efficacy ................................................. 25  
   2.6 Differing Perceptions ................................................................................................... 26  
   2.7 Enablers for parental involvement and engagement in learning ............................... 27  
      Six factors ...................................................................................................................... 27  

3
Parent, student and teacher beliefs about parental involvement in a child’s learning

5.1 Understandings about parental involvement ............................................................. 51
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 52
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 52
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 53

5.2 How are parents currently involved in their child’s learning? .................................... 54
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 54
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 55
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 56

5.3 Most important thing a parent can do to support a child in their learning .............. 57
   Parents and students ............................................................................................... 57
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 57

5.4 What do parents value most about being involved in their child’s learning? .......... 58
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 58
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 59
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 59

5.5 Impact of parental involvement on a child’s learning ............................................. 59

5.6 Activities associated with Parental Involvement that help a child’s learning .......... 60
   Parental involvement outside of school ................................................................. 61

5.7 Enablers for ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’ .................................... 62
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 62
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 62
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 63

5.8 Barriers for ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’ ..................................... 63
   Parents and teachers ............................................................................................... 63
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 64
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 64

5.9 Definitions of learning .............................................................................................. 65
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 66
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 66
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 66

5.10 Purpose of learning ................................................................................................. 66
   Parents .......................................................................................................................... 67
   Teachers ...................................................................................................................... 67
Parent, student and teacher beliefs about parental involvement in a child’s learning

5.1 Role of teachers, students and parents in a child’s learning ........................................... 67
   Role of teachers and schools ............................................................................................ 67
   Role of parents in a child’s learning .................................................................................. 68
   Role of children in their learning ..................................................................................... 69

5.2 Barriers to teacher encouragement of parental involvement .................................................. 70

5.3 What makes it easy for teachers to encourage parental involvement? .................................... 71

5.4 Dream example of ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’ .................................................. 71
   Parents, teachers and students .......................................................................................... 71
   Teachers ............................................................................................................................. 72
   Parents .............................................................................................................................. 72

5.5 Barriers to the dream ......................................................................................................... 72
   Parents .............................................................................................................................. 73
   Teachers ............................................................................................................................. 73

5.6 What needs to change to make the dream possible? ............................................................. 74
   Parents .............................................................................................................................. 74
   Teachers ............................................................................................................................. 75

5.7 Chapter Summary ............................................................................................................... 75
   How do parents, teachers and senior primary students perceive ‘parental involvement
   in a child’s learning’? ......................................................................................................... 75
   What factors do parents, teachers and senior students encounter that impact
   ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’? ..................................................................... 76

6. Discussion .......................................................................................................................... 77
   6.1 Differing perceptions ....................................................................................................... 78
   6.2 Involvement versus engagement ..................................................................................... 79
   6.3 Creation of an environment that support both the child and their learning......................... 81
   6.4 Parental factors influencing parental involvement ............................................................ 82
       Parental role construction ................................................................................................ 82
       Views about learning ....................................................................................................... 83
   6.5 School factors influencing parental involvement ............................................................... 84
       Deficit thinking ................................................................................................................ 84
       Valuing what is seen ......................................................................................................... 85
       Language and deficit thinking ........................................................................................ 86
Second step of coding ..................................................................................................... 127
Themes to theories ......................................................................................................... 128
What parents love about being involved in their child’s learning codes ......................... 129

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Explanatory sequential research design ........................................................... 33
Figure 2: Numbers of participants .................................................................................. 45
Figure 3: Example of process of coding from each school ............................................. 48
Figure 4: Example of process from open coding to axial coding .................................... 49
Figure 5: Understandings about ‘parental involvement in learning’ ............................... 52
Figure 6: Student Responses “what is ‘parental involvement in learning?’” .................. 53
Figure 7: How are parents currently involved? ............................................................... 54
Figure 8: How are parents currently involved in their child's learning? Interview data ...... 55
Figure 9: How are parents currently involved? Student Questionnaire answers .......... 56
Figure 10: What is the most important thing a parent can do to support a child in their learning? Questionnaire data ................................................................. 57
Figure 11: What do you love most about parental involvement? ..................................... 58
Figure 12: Importance of Parental involvement in a child’s learning ............................... 60
Figure 13: Top five types of Parental involvement ........................................................... 61
Figure 14: Top 5 types of Parental involvement out of school ........................................ 61
Figure 15: Enablers of parental involvement in a child's learning .................................. 62
Figure 16: Enablers of parental involvement in a child's learning .................................. 63
Figure 17: Barriers to parental involvement in a child's learning ................................... 64
Figure 18: Enablers for parental involvement. Students ................................................... 65
Figure 19: What is learning? ............................................................................................. 65
Figure 20: “what makes it hard to encourage ‘parental involvement in a child’s learning’” 70
Figure 21: What makes it easy to encourage parental involvement ................................. 71
Figure 22: Barriers to the dream ..................................................................................... 73
Figure 23: Changes needed for the dream to occur ......................................................... 74
Figure 24: Themes and sub-themes ................................................................................ 78