

## Parental Involvement in their Children's Education During the Pandemic

Mansi Aneja

Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi.

### Abstract

Parental involvement in children's education has always been considered as important but its significance has increased manifold during the pandemic. As the schooling takes place from the home, parents have to take up the role of full-time educators, manage household chores and work from home and fully take the responsibility of child care and children's education in absence of any institutional support. The parental engagement becomes all the more challenging in single parent families and dual earner families. The role of schools become important to ensure home-school connect (for the child) and to ensure parental participation and collaboration in the time of pandemic.

**Keywords-** *Parents, Education, Children, Online teaching, Pandemic*

COVID -19 as a global pandemic has drastically impacted the schooling experience for children. The online continuation of schooling requires sustained and considerable parental involvement, especially, for young children. The current article summarises author's observations and reflections on the parental involvement in their children's education during pandemic. It is based on the case study of a young child whose online classes were observed for a span of four months last year. The author carefully took down notes during the classes which were further studied and discussed with fellow colleagues and scholars. At varied times, author also had telephonic and face to face conversations with few parents who have young children and are currently involved with their online education. The present article is based on author's observations of the online classes and interactions with select parents. It comprises of three sections namely- Parents taking on the role of full-time educators in the pandemic, coping with health concerns and economic uncertainties in pandemic and parental involvement in single parent families and dual earner families.

### Parents taking on the role of full time Educators during the Pandemic

Parental involvement in their children's education has always been considered important in many scholarly writings and research literature (Coleman, 1966; Epstein, 1989; Haack, 2007; Redding, 1991). Coleman's famous research of 1966 (as cited in Dickinson, 2016) highlighted that a student's family background is the most significant determinant of how well a child would learn in school or child's

educational success over many other factors such as physical amenities at school or funding. Joyce Epstein's decade long research (1989) on parental involvement in their child's schooling emphasizes the need to understand the relevance of family-school continuity in a child's life along with understanding how schools and families can support one another. Haack (2007) in her doctoral thesis cites various research studies that have shown parental involvement being critical for child's academic success- language development (Senechal & Lefevre, 2002), mathematics achievement (Sheldon and Epstein, 2005) and better adjustment in schools (Mc Wayne et al., 2004). Haack (2007) also discusses many research studies which emphasize that the parental involvement also leads to improved school attendance, inculcates regular homework habits and positive attitudes towards schools, leads to increased educational and career aspirations in children. Redding (1991) states that identifiable patterns of family life manifested in the parent-child relationship, routines of family life and family expectations and supervision contribute to a child's ability to learn in a school.

The role and engagement of parents of young children has become all the more pertinent during the times of pandemic as children continue with their schooling in an online mode. Not only do the parents have to continue with the role of caretakers for their children, they also have to assume the role of full time 'educators'. It involves parents multi-tasking various aspects of child rearing along with taking out time to attend online sessions along with their children.

During these sessions, parents provide technical assistance, translate and simplify instructions given by the teachers, arrange and organise for materials, stationery and books needed for online classes, prepare a conducive (silent and clean) space for learning in the house, respond to child's queries and repeat instructions/procedures wherever necessary, make sure that the assigned tasks of the school are completed and submitted on daily basis and so on. The engagement of parents is not limited to attending the classes with their children. Parents are intimated about necessary information regarding worksheets, projects and home tasks all day long through the social networking platforms and Emails. They are also advised to regularly check school websites for any notifications.

The processes and practices of the school are emulated and conveyed very effectively through the agency of the parents. These include disciplinary as well as pedagogic processes. Parents are expected to guard and monitor the mobility and behaviour of their child while he/she is on screen. There are regular reminders for the parents to ascertain that children are presentable during classes, have eaten food before the class to minimise disturbances, are sitting in right posture while attending classes and even responding in a manner which is acceptable to the school. The parents are also trained in pedagogic processes by giving meticulous instructions on daily basis regarding how the written work is to be done in the notebooks, conceptual progression in different disciplines, practice and revision schedules that need to be followed and so on. Through the online classes, not only children but their parents are also becoming subjects of disciplinary and pedagogic practices of the school.

### **Coping with health concerns and economic uncertainties during the Pandemic**

The online classes provide a sense of continuity with the schooling experience. It also provides an assurance that the learning process of children is maintained along with the covering of the prescribed syllabus. Day after day, conceptual progression of various disciplines unfolds and children are taught to excel in various skills and abilities. The consistency and perseverance through which slotted syllabi are covered in pre decided time slots, elevates the process of learning from the existent crisis of health scare and financial constraints that the child's family

may face. It is almost as if the normalcy and everydayness of the school life is replicated through the online classes. No attempt is made to address the mental health of the children and their families or to attend to their anxieties, doubts and fears. The fact that the children are only able to have minimal or no peer interactions for months at length is something not considered as important to be included in these online sessions. Parents would need to spend considerable amount of time to address these concerns in absence of regular schooling.

Spending time exclusively with children while not worrying about doing the household chores and financial constraints is a luxury that only few parents can afford during the pandemic. This idea is explained well by Lareau (2003) who states that the social class of parents shape their attitudes towards parenting, cultural beliefs and practices about child-rearing. Economic and material resources of a particular social class influence educational outcomes of children belonging to those classes. The parents of middle and upper classes employ a peculiar way of parenting (termed as concerted cultivation), which focusses on "Children's structured activities, language development, and reasoning in the home, and active intervention in schooling" (Lareau, 2003, p.32). Parents practicing concerted cultivation actively volunteer, intervene and participate in educational activities of their children. They structure their children's lives by systematically organising leisure and extra-curricular activities, leaving no time for free play. In comparison to concertedly cultivating the children, parents of working and low-income classes value natural growth of children.

Parents who have economic and material resources use this 'concerted cultivation' to best of their advantage in the pandemic times. This is done by ensuring uninterrupted network coverage, devices to attend the class, being able to regularly attend online classes with the child, preparing them to converse well in English, helping the children to efficiently complete the assigned home tasks and perform well during online interactions.

### **Parental Involvement in Single Parent Families and Dual Earner Families**

In contemporary times, there are many families which are unique in terms of number of family

members residing in a home at a particular time and roles/ responsibilities as shared by family members. Few such families can be of single parent families and dual earner families (D'Cruz & Bharat, 2001). Single parent families are those where children are dependents and the responsibility of upbringing of children lies predominantly on one parent and dual earner families are those where both parents are contributing financially to the household income and jointly sharing the upbringing and rearing of dependent children (ibid, 2001).

Online classes for young children, during the pandemic, would often require continuous presence and availability of the parent. The process becomes tedious and challenging in the families of single parent or dual earner, due to absence of any institutional support system (daycares, creches and household help) or help from other family members. The parent (s) living alone at the time and working from the home often juggles between managing the everyday household work and sustaining the family financially. They have to face the additional stressors of meeting the requirements and expectations of the school. It is to ascertain the regular schooling experience for their children by increasingly pedagogizing the home space. It means to work out a daily schedule that reflects certain time slot to attend children's classes, to get the homework done, to figure out ways to engage children all day long. Also, to create learning opportunities for the children at home like reading storybooks, playing boardgames and so on. Single parents and dual earner parents also experience anxiety about increased daily screen time and guilt of not being able to spend qualitative time with their children.

### Conclusion

The importance of parental involvement in their children's education has emerged as an important aspect of online teaching during the

pandemic. Parents are increasingly perceived as crucial stakeholders and participants in the learning process of their children as schooling is happening from home. This essentially requires that regular and detailed communication transpires between schools and homes so as to enable parents to continue the engagement of their children in structured learning. We can learn tremendously from Joyce Epstein's work (1989) on teachers' practices of parent involvement and effects of family-school connection on students, parents and teachers. She discusses five types of parent involvement and states that parents wish to be more involved in their children's learning, especially at home and they need clear direction from school. She describes five major types of parental involvement in terms of basic obligation of parents, basic obligations of schools, parent involvement at school, parent involvement in learning activities at home and parental involvement in governance and advocacy (Epstein, 1989, p.25).

Besides ensuring persistent home-school connection in this pandemic, we also need to have regular counselling and support sessions for the children and the parents. Schools can facilitate online platforms for parent support groups, individual teacher- parent interactions, engagement with school counsellors, training sessions for parents to orient them with the use of technology in their children's education. The nature of home tasks and assignments also need to be such that young children can independently engage, with minimal or no support from the parents. The focus of children's education during pandemic needs to go beyond the purview of syllabus completion and should also include the concerns of mental health, better adjustability and preparedness for the ongoing pandemic and creating safe, comfortable environment at home which is conducive for learning.

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