



1 “Just Because I’m Not There Doesn’t Mean I Don’t Care!”

Challenging Class-Based Assumptions (Low-Income families’ Perceptions of Family Involvement.) Author Lisa Hoffman

Who We Are:

- Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) Host of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being (KNSWB) Equity and Inclusion Community of Practice with a focus on Low-Income Students and Families.

Objectives

- To bring knowledge and awareness on the inequitable and exclusionary experiences of students from low income families to educators at the local level in our communities (teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees).
- To build a base of awareness and commitment among educators, parents and students in our communities that could advocate for systemic change in the education system to end/reduce inequitable and exclusionary treatment for low income students and families.
- To interrupt biases, assumptions and commonly held misconceptions of low-income students and parents which serve to undermine student achievement, well-being and meaningful parent engagement.

Compared to students from higher SES families, students from lower SES families feel less positive about their school life and are less involved in school extra-curricular activities. **Lower SES parents were also less involved in the school.**

Toronto District School Board Parent census (2012)

There is growing evidence that community-centric approaches to parent engagement are more successful than school-centric ones, particularly for families on low incomes . There needs to be a shift from superficial parent ‘involvement’ to deeper and more meaningful parent ‘engagement; and schools cannot do parent engagement work alone and should take advantage of the social capital expertise of community organizations. **Beyond the Bakesale: A Community Based Relational Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools.** Teachers College Record. Vol 3, # 9, 2009. Warren, Hong, et al. (Warren, et al, 2009)

Overall the research indicates that **parental involvement at home has more impact** on student achievement than parental involvement in school-based activities.. **A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement.** Urban Education, (40)3: 237-269 . Jeynes, W.H. (2005

Examining assumptions, biases and beliefs of School Staff re: Low-income students and parents.

Instead of looking outward at families or communities as reasons for low parental engagement or unsatisfactory student outcomes, schools have a responsibility to look inward at their own assumptions and beliefs, and how these are lived out in their practices, as a starting place for changing the school landscape. **Parent Engagement: Creating a Shared World.** Debbie Pusher, PhD.

Parents who are not visible in school events/meetings continue to be judged for not valuing education.

“How teachers perceived parents influenced the expectations they had for their students, the type of work that was assigned, and the type of support that was expected from home. The largest difference in teacher perceptions was how they felt a lack of volunteer support from LSES (Low Socio-economic Status) parents in the classroom, and an abundance of support from HSES (High Socio-Economic) parents. This perception further affirmed the belief that HSES parents cared more about their children’s education. **Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Low and High Socio-Economic Status Students.** Author Patty C. Norman 2016

What are common beliefs about people who are poor?

- There is a "culture of poverty" in which poor people share beliefs, values, and behaviors. -
People are poor because of their own bad life choices and laziness
- Poor parents can't help their children learn without outside help or instruction -
Poor parents don't value education and aren't involved in their children's schooling

These beliefs are NOT supported by academic research, yet they are pervasive in schools. (*Compton-Lilly, 2003; Flessa, 2010; Grenfell & James, 1998; Howard, 2006; Ladso-Billings, 2009*).

How do these beliefs impact poor students and their families?

- Educators have lower levels of trust in students/parents in low-income schools (*Goddard et al, "A Multi-Level Examination of Teacher Trust in Parents and Students in Urban Elementary Schools" 2009*)
- Teachers lower their expectations for students' academic achievement which contributes to students' lower expectations of themselves (*Tyler & Boelter, 2008*)
- Parents are stigmatized before they even enter the school and are not inclined to take an active role in schools, reinforcing teachers' beliefs that they don't value education.

These outcomes are known to negatively impact students' academic achievement and parent engagement with schools (*Goddard et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2013; Norman, 2016*).

When it comes to working with parents, what can educators do or do differently?

Examine their own assumptions, beliefs/practices to explain student outcomes & parent engagement. (*Pushor, 2007*)

Don't view parents' absence in schools as lack of involvement or investment in education. What parents do at home has more impact on student achievement than parent involvement in the school. (*Jeynes, A Meta-Analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students. Urban Education, 2012*)

De-emphasize efforts to bring parents into schools. Interact with parents on their own terms, in ways that are non-judgmental. (*Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2009; Flessa, p.11;*)

Focus on communicating, collaborating, and building relationships between parents and between parents and educators. (*Leithwood, 2012; Mattingly et al., 2002; Ream & Palardy, 2008*)

Collaborate with community-based organizations who can assist with the following:

- Developing parents' leadership and advocacy skills. (*Warren, et al, 2012*)
- Leading efforts to address inequalities in resources and power between teachers and parents. (*Warren, et al, 2012*)
- Examining and challenging systemic and social barriers parents face. (*Roffey et al, 2008*)

What are some Concerns/Criticisms of the Growing Emphasis on Parent Involvement?

It may represent a further down-loading of the collective responsibility for student academic success, to individuals: teachers and parents. Parent involvement in school also can become part of the construction of what it is to be a good parent. Do parents really need another reason for doubting or judging themselves?

"Future research should investigate how parental involvement can be made more effective, but until then, parents who have been less involved or who feel uncertain about how they should be involved should not be stigmatized." (*Robinson/ Harris, 2014*)