



What can teachers learn about parental involvement in this corona crisis?

I recently published most of this article in a Dutch professional magazine for teacher counselors. It is called LBBO magazine. LBBO stands for: Professional group for professional counselors (www.lbbo.nl).

Home education may have helped parents and teachers to realize the importance of parental involvement. Most parents are committed to supporting their children with school work. But not all of them. What do we learn about parental involvement through home education?

Just before the corona crisis, I received an email from a primary school director asking if I could arrange a parent's evening. He wrote: "We have noticed that learning / developing is not always high on the agenda of parents at home." That will have changed for many parents now, due to the period of home education. What an incredible amount of work has been done, by schools but also by parents!

Homeschooling seems to work well in most cases. At the same time, we notice how important school education is. Many children would like to go back to school, and teachers indicate that they miss contact with the children so much. Contact, which is also necessary to transfer learning material well. The question is what we will learn from home education and parental involvement in this for the future. To do this, we must first dig deeper into what parental involvement actually is.

Several studies have taught us in recent decades that not so much parental participation (the volunteering of parents at school), but parental involvement shows positive effects on the development and well-being of pupils. And that involvement of parents mainly takes place at home. That is why it is also called "home involvement". It is not always clear what this involvement at home will look like, let alone how it can be influenced as a school (Bakker et al., 2013). Too quickly, I think, the conclusion has been drawn that "parent involvement at home" mainly means that children have to do all kinds of schoolwork at home, such as practicing words, reading, and so on. In that context, the above remark by the director is easy to understand and in this view home education also thrives. After all, parents now have to get to work.

The first structural focus on parental involvement arose in the early nineteenth century in the United States. We can read about formal meetings in 1815 when the effects of parents were discussed and their influence on their child's school development. The reason for paying attention to parental involvement at the time were concerns about the development of children from lower social backgrounds and of migrant children. Parents from affluent families guided their children in their school development. By teaching how the parents of lesser-off families could also support their children with school, these children would have better opportunities (Berger, 1991). In the Netherlands, attention for parental involvement is also mainly based on the goal of promoting pupils' school performances and giving all pupils equal opportunities (Bakker, 2016). And here we see something striking: where parental involvement was until recently mainly used to reduce opportunity inequalities, in this current period right now we see the increasing fear of opportunity inequalities due to home education. Now the difference between families and parents sometimes becomes painfully

clear. Some parents fully help their children with their school work, while others hardly, if any at all. Are the latter less involved? Or does this period of homeschooling make it clear that we may have to understand the concept of parental involvement differently?

We must be careful in drawing conclusions based on this period of home schooling. After all, no research is known into a comparable situation in which we tried to continue schoolwork at home as much as possible using our digital means. Another reason why we cannot draw too many conclusions yet is that the children, their parents, their families and relatives, their street and neighborhood, our country and even the whole world have been or still are in a bizarre situation. Right through everything is a grief process that almost everyone, to a greater or lesser degree, has to deal with. Also children and young people. After all, they were (or are) confronted with losses in many ways. Loss of going to school: even if it seemed like a holiday at first, children missed their classmates, their teacher, the building, the square, the structure. But also, for example, sports in a club context. Grandpa and grandma are no longer allowed to visit. And some have (had) to deal with (serious) illness and demise in the vicinity and sometimes can / could hardly visit or say goodbye.

Children and young people also receive - often unconsciously - some of their parents' grief. Parents who mourn the loss of work and income, the loss of colleagues and the inability to meet their parents and friends. When we look at the grief process from the model of Kübler-Ross (2006) about the stages of grief, we see different stages through which we, but also children / young people, go through in shock: denial - anger - haggling - sadness - acceptance. A child who does not accept his mother's home schooling by saying, "You're not my teacher!" May be in denial. A teenager who shows offensive behavior or has a tantrum that astonishes his parents may have to deal with his anger.

A child trying to get out of his homework may be processing by haggling. And an adolescent who shows listless behavior for a while may be sad.

The grieving process needs space and is often impossible to steer with a clear structure (which we sometimes insist on now). Just like adults, children also need time to process what is happening.

Parents now experience this up close with their children. I hear them say that they are gaining more respect for the teacher because they now notice how their child can be. But there is a good chance that the grieving process sometimes gives a distorted picture of their own child.

In our view, "parent involvement" is about parents showing their commitment to schoolwork in visible behavior. But... are not all parents naturally involved since it is their child? All in their own way and sometimes completely different from what we professionals hope for? Think of: parents who now mainly give their children a break and in our eyes neglect schoolwork.

Isn't it the other way around: parental involvement is not the involvement by parents, but the involvement with parents?

If you are involved with parents, you as a teacher know better what every child needs. (Perhaps that could also be: give this student a break...). Equal cooperation is created, in which parents and the teacher (and as the student grows older more and more) coordinate what is needed for optimal development of the student and who makes what contribution. Parents feel heard, think and therefore actively participate and are (even) better able to support their children in everything. Personal contact with each parent is a prerequisite for the optimal development of all students.

Now that we have to "divide" the schoolwork with parents, this also forces us together to much better identify when things are not going well with a student. Parents may now discover things in their child that they only knew from hearing the teacher saying. When temporary home schooling teaches us that parental involvement is not primarily about sending

information about what parents 'should do' at home with their child, but that we should work with parents on the basis of good contact. Teachers and parents can help each other to draw much more attention to signs of unwellness that a child sends out (at home or soon at school), to discover a faltering development together and, above all, to report what is going well!

We can therefore learn from the situation of home education that the subject matter is not the primary concern - and not even the mutual expectations. It's all about the personal contact between the professional and each parent. Those who mainly expect involvement from parents will soon be disappointed. Those who are involved with parents often have to deal with beautiful and sometimes moving surprises. Parents tell the story about their child, but often also about themselves and their own school past, so that you suddenly learn to understand your student much better. It becomes clear to you, for example, why some students are hardly motivated to read at home. Although almost all parents want their child to be able to do everything and they sometimes have (too) high expectations, one thing is often even more important: "Don't do to my child what happened to me before." In other words: "My child should not be laughed at when he reads something aloud in class. "You may only hear from the father:" Well, reading is not so important, I got there without being able to read well. "

Parents only tell the real story when there is a relationship. The period of homeschooling teaches us as professionals to interpret 'parent involvement' differently and to work together with parents instead of 'putting parents to work at home' to support the school. Incidentally, the fact that parents and teachers work together does not mean that they have to sit in each other's chairs. The famous professor Joyce Epstein speaks about *family like schools* and *school like families*: school and home should not be too far apart (Epstein, 2009). At home people

stimulate school development, at school a child is not just a student. But that still makes school home and at home. It is important that this remains that way.

The Dutch researcher Van der Ploeg (2018) notes that the division of tasks between school and home is less clearly defined today than before. As a result, the relationship between parents and teachers has also changed: they have become more dependent on each other.

Due to the period of home education, the borderline between school and home may become even more blurred. Is that beneficial? That seems to me the question.

Parents, teachers and supervisors each have their own role. It is good if they keep them and cooperate with each other from those different roles.

Powerful teachers are indispensable in good education. It is important for teachers to actively disseminate their knowledge and skills. Or, as an American teacher wrote to parents in this crisis, "Don't worry about falling behind in school. All children are in the same boat and they will all manage. When we get back to the classroom, we're going to correct their course and accommodate them at their level. Teachers are experts in this! "

Parents are mainly there to provide an educational context.

I hope that this bizarre global situation will result in us as teachers and parents working together even better and innovative in education. So that we prepare students together for today's society, but especially tomorrow's as well.

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