Teacher Knowledge and Dispositions towards Parents and Families: Rethinking Influences and Education of Early Childhood Pre-service teachers

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Abstract

Historically teachers’ knowledge, attitudes and dispositions towards parental involvement have been considerably non-existent and negative. This trend is well documented in the research on parental involvement in education. In the twenty-first century, early childhood educators must possess the current requisite knowledge and skills to meet existing challenges in their work with diverse students and families. Although the tide has changed in contemporary times and the research now points to achieving parental involvement in the various activities of their children’s education, recent research stresses the importance of teaching pre-service teachers with the focus and experiences on working with families (Abrego et al. 2006, Graue, 2005). Moreover, to better prepare future teachers, schools of education need to help teacher candidates develop positive attitudes toward families and encourage teachers to draw upon the knowledge and strengths of families to make the classroom education students receive relevant (Knopf, H., & Swick, K. 2008). The question remains how do teachers develop the knowledge as well as these attitudes and dispositions to work successfully with families? A review of research finds that although practicing teachers believe that working with families is important to positive outcomes for children, teachers reported receiving little formal training and, therefore possess minimal knowledge and skills to work with parents (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). In this paper we explore the various ways that pre-services teachers are exposed to information on parents and families and discusses the important issues related to pre-service teachers’ knowledge and dispositions on the importance of working with families as an integral part of the education of children. We examined the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their dispositions towards working with families. The survey data on teacher knowledge and dispositions gathered as part of this study is shared and we provide some strategies for a curricular approach towards working with families.

Introduction

Historically teachers’ knowledge, attitudes and dispositions toward parental involvement have been considerably non-existent and negative. This trend is well documented in the research on parental involvement in education (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998; Burton, 1992; Horn, 2003). In the 1990 Handbook of Research on Teacher Education the educational goals recognized family involvement in children’s education as a priority for program development but there were no index entries about families, parents, or family involvement. In the 1996 edition, the Handbook examined family, community, and school collaboration (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997) demonstrating the importance of family involvement in teacher education programs.