

The involvement of families in a school context: A qualitative study

La participación de las familias en el contexto escolar: Un estudio cualitativo

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Background

Different qualitative studies conducted with teachers have identified, according to their perceptions and beliefs, that relationships with families have improved after ethnographic visits to their homes, showing greater mutual trust, dismantling prejudices and stereotypes in relation to families of diverse sociocultural origin, as well as greater participation and interest on the part of the families visited in school activities, although the factors that, according to teachers and families participating in the educational program Funds of Knowledge, contribute to a better family-school relationship have not been studied. Specifically, there are no studies on the perceptions of the families visited, since the existing studies have focused on the perceptions of teachers.

Aims

To identify the factors that influence the improvement of family-school relations, specifically, to investigate the perception of teachers and families participating in the Funds of Knowledge educational program in relation to the following specific objectives: to identify arguments in favor and against the participation of families in the school; to know the type of involvement desired from families in the school; to identify the type of involvement desired from the school in relation to families; and finally, to identify the difficulties for the participation of families according to the participants in the study.

Method & procedures

The study was developed according to the qualitative analysis methodology, within the framework of grounded theory, characterized by the construction of codes and categories based on the analysis of textual corpus or empirical material and categorizing them. It was carried out in a public school in the city of Girona, characterized by a high number of students with families of foreign origin. The objectives and characteristics of the Funds of Knowledge approach were explained to the school's board of directors and staff, who assessed the suitability of the program to the school's needs and accepted the proposal to carry it out, creating a workgroup made up of the teachers participating in the program and the researchers. The study group evaluated the experience in each phase by analyzing the implementation of the program, in order to assess the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Six teachers and six families belonging to the Early Childhood Education cycle participated. In order to analyze the teachers' vision, an open-ended questionnaire was elaborated and to know the vision of the participating families, a script was elaborated to facilitate the semi-structured interviews, after the teachers' visits to the homes and the families' participation in the school; these interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and a field diary was also used. The analysis of the content of the questionnaires and the transcriptions of the interviews was analyzed with the Atlas.ti version 8.4.4 program, and an open coding system was used to categorize the relevant generic concepts and associate the main categories to the objectives of this study, both from the point of view of the teachers and the families.

Results & discussion

Our results were divided into the four categories of analysis created a priori which respond to the nature of the specific objectives, according to the perception of the participating teachers and families: Arguments for and against the families' participation in the school; desired families' involvement in the school; the desired school involvement with the families; and limitations in the families' participation in the school. In favor of family participation, the consideration that, according to the teachers' view, the school is enriched by incorporating their knowledge and skills, as well as facilitates the establishment of continuities through the exchange and mutual support in the students' school activities, stands out. On the other hand, teachers express concerns about the "intrusion" of families, as well as the exercise of roles that, according to them, do not correspond to them, such as the role of teacher. Regarding the desired involvement of families in the school, the former considers that their involvement in the school should begin with helping their sons and daughters with their homework; the willingness to collaborate with the school, the desire to teach their culture of origin and to promote activities in the classroom are also highlighted.

Conclusion

As a whole, the results allow us to distinguish four considerations: family participation should be based on knowledge of the hobbies, history, interests and significant life practices of the family unit; the activities proposed should make sense to the families, starting precisely from their local experiences and practices that shape their knowledge, skills and abilities; the school should lead the establishment and maintenance of such relationships and participation, overcoming certain prejudices identified in this study, mainly on the part of teachers towards families; the school must lead the establishment and maintenance of these relationships and participation, overcoming certain prejudices identified in this study, mainly on the part of teachers towards families; and it is necessary to provide adequate conditions to facilitate participation (time and effective communication channels, for example, through a mediator figure). Our data indicate that the idea of the involvement and participation of families may depend, precisely, on the involvement, interest and participation of the teaching staff in the recognition of the significant socio-cultural experiences and practices of students and their families.

Keywords: continuity-discontinuity framework, cultural diversity, funds of knowledge, home-school relationships, parental involvement

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