Title: The effects of parent training programmes on children's preparedness for school and on parent's support of children's development and learning in school

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The Effects of Parent Training Programmes on Children's Preparedness for School and on Parent's Support of Children's Development and Learning in School

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The purpose of this three year experimental study (1997-2000) was to investigate whether two parent training programmes could increase working parent's (lower and middle income) direct involvement and confidence in preparing their K2 children to start school and to support their children's learning at home, particularly after school entry. The sample comprised mainly of parents considered to be less likely to participate in school activities and who might find it more difficult to assist their children with their homework.

Research Questions

There were four research questions for this study.

i. Do children's academic, language and school entry skills improve as a result of the two parent training programmes!

ii. What are the effects on parent's knowledge, confidence and level of involvement in their child's development and education by attending the training programmes?

iii. Are there any differences in outcomes between the two types of parent training programmes?

iv. Are any differences between the three groups maintained following school entry?

Methodology

An investigation was designed to identify the effects of two types of parent training programmes. One provided interactive parent-child guided-play sessions and the second focussed only on the parents through parent workshop sessions. The programmes were conducted in the childcare centres that the children attended. The effects of the training upon the parents and their children were compared...
with a control group from the same childcare organisation but where no parent training sessions were provided.

There was a one-year follow-up phase to identify whether any gains made during the pre-school intervention period had been sustained over time and in the changed environment of the school. A replication of the study was conducted in the following year with a new cohort of families in the same six childcare centres but with treatments alternated to counter any centre effects.

The children's progress and the level of the parents' support for their development and learning was measured before and after a five month intervention phase by standardised informal tests, checklists, structured interviews and questionnaires. Their progress was also followed-up at two points during Primary One by school exam results and by teacher, parent and child questionnaires.

Results

The results of the study are summarised in point form.

i Significant improvements (p<.001) were made in language and cognitive skills by the end of the K2 intervention period by the children whose parents had attended the parent training sessions when compared with those in the control group, whose parents did not attend the parent training sessions.

ii Parents who attended the training sessions increased their knowledge of their child's strengths and weaknesses and likes and dislikes. The time spent completing educational activities with their child, especially reading together increased. There was also an increase in their confidence in being able to assist their child with their learning in primary school compared with the control group.

iii There were no significant differences between the outcomes of the two different methods of parent training. Both methods of parent training (parent-child interactive learning sessions and the parent workshops/talks) were equally effective.

iv Although there were no significant differences between the three groups in the Primary One examination results (SA1 and SA2), there was a clear trend where children who had attended the Guided Play sessions with their parents scored higher results than did the children whose parents attended the workshops who, in turn, performed better than the children in the control group.

Most children settled well into school. The number of children in this study failing school exams was very small. The main areas of difficulty cited by parents related to heavy school bags, coping with Hanyu Pinyin and how to help their children with project work. Many parents considered that there was insufficient school-home communication compared to pre-school. There was a plea from parents who were not confident in English for more school-home communication (written and verbal) to be conducted in the different mother tongues as well as in English. These parents were also having some difficulty in helping their children with their homework which they feared would get worse as the standard of work got harder as their children progressed through the school.

Conclusions

The overall conclusion from this study was that the parent training programmes held during the last year in preschool was successful in improving the children's skills and in empowering their parents by increasing their knowledge, skills and confidence. The project also demonstrated that even busy working parents, whose main home language was not English and whose educational qualifications were generally limited, were interested in learning how to support their children's learning at home. The fact that the group differences were not maintained in primary school are in line with others reported in the literature. The consensus of research is that in order to achieve longer lasting benefits, the interventions need to consist of fully comprehensive services in health, education and social support services, be longer-term, and have follow through support in primary school for at least two years (Zigler, 1993; Horace, 1987; Fuerst & Fuerst, 1991).

Recommendations

This study had sufficient beneficial effects during the final year in Kindergarten for consideration to be given to similar projects being set-up in other preschool centres to increase parent involvement throughout the preschool years and not just in K2. Increasing parent involvement during primary school is also recommended. However, it should be noted that parents have differing skills and needs. It is important that schools consider these differences when communicating with parents and in terms of the roles expected and activities offered.

References


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