

Don't Ignore Their Voice: Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs About Home-school Cooperation in China

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Abstract: The aim of this qualitative study was to examine the beliefs of pre-service teachers on home-school cooperation and the sources and influences that shape pre-service teachers' beliefs about home-school collaboration. Data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with ten pre-service teachers in East China Normal University in Shanghai. Data were analysed using cluster analysis. Findings indicate pre-service teachers' beliefs about home-school cooperation are partially at odds with current policy reform advocacy in China. The formation of these beliefs was most influenced by personal experiences in primary and secondary schooling, followed by others' case sharing, internship experiences, and the news media. Teacher education should emphasize the development of competencies related to home-school cooperation.

Keywords: Pre-service teacher; Home-school cooperation; Teachers' beliefs

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, considerable research has demonstrated the important role of home-school cooperation in students' academic achievement, social-emotional competency development, and well-being. According to theoretical and empirical evidence, school especially teachers play pivotal roles in establishing and maintaining a good teacher-parent relationship. Because there is evidence that pre-service teachers' beliefs about parent involvement inform practices (Alaçam & Olgan, 2019), it is critical to gain an understanding of pre-service teachers' beliefs of home-school cooperation.

2. Literature review

In regard to beliefs about home-school cooperation, we were specifically interested in better understanding pre-teachers' beliefs about the relationship of parent-teacher, the style of parental involvement. Moreover, this section introduces the relevant theories and researches on the sources and influencing factors of belief.

2.1 The relationship of parent-teacher

Currently, family-school partnership proposed by Epstein based on the theory of overlapping domains of influence is considered to be the most ideal home-school relationship. Epstein believes partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (Epstein, 2010). Many Chinese scholars have also explored the types of home-school relationships. Huang, Fei-Fei et al. (2018) classified home-school relationships as "intimate", "affiliated" and "detached" through a survey of parents.

2.2 The style of parental involvement

After long-term experiments and continuous refinement, Epstein's team divided the home-school cooperation activities into six categories and built a set of action framework to effectively guide the practice, namely, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 2018). In addition, influenced by cultural traditions and technological development, the Chinese approach to home-school cooperation presents its own characteristics, which include teachers' home visits and WeChat parent groups.

2.3 Sources and influential factors of belief

In 1986, Bandura published his book *The Social Foundations of Thought and Action - A Social Cognitive Theory*, which proposed

the famous tripartite reciprocity theory model, arguing that teachers' beliefs have six sources: Formal Education, Formalized Bodies of Knowledge, Observational Learning, Collaboration with Others, Enactive Experiences, and Self-reflection. Bandura's theory has been confirmed by many empirical studies.

3. Result of this study

Ten students as pre-teachers from the college of teacher education of the East China Normal University (ECNU) in Shanghai participated in the study, and the research results are as follows.

3.1 Effects of home-school cooperation

This study shows perspectives on the effect of home-school cooperation were multi-faceted and were represented in both positive and negative aspects. Pre-service teachers, regardless of the subject they are preparing to teach in the future, generally agree that home-school cooperation plays an important role in educational reform and student growth, and that it is essential to get to know families and parents. However, they also expressed concerns about the additional work and pressure that home-school cooperation brings to teachers.

3.2 The relationship of parent-teacher

The results of this section present a discussion of three themes, including how pre-service teachers view the primary responsibilities that families should have in home-school partnerships, the primary responsibilities of teachers in family education guidance, and family-school partnerships.

When talking about the main educational responsibilities that families or parents should undertake in home school cooperation, pre-service teachers believe that compared to school family education, it has irreplaceable advantages in focusing on students' physical and mental health, personality development, behavioral habits and value cultivation.

When talking about how teachers should play the role of family education guidance, one respondent felt that parents would have a lot of confusion about educating their children that they wanted to address, and that school and teachers were the most reliable way for them to do so. She said, "I think parents actually need this content (knowledge about home education) urgently, but they have no other way to learn about it, and the most reliable way is to ask their children's teachers." But the majority of respondents questioned whether teachers should take on the task of family education guidance and expressed concerns about their ability.

Additionally, pre-service teachers also expressed their views on family-school partnership. Most pre-service teachers agreed with the partnership narrative from the perspective of sharing a common goal. However, they also expressed concerns about whether this ideal relationship could be established, including concerns about parental competence and quality, concerns about status of teachers, and concerns about becoming too close to parents.

3.3 The style of parental involvement

In the interviews, respondents answered their readiness and preferences for strategies to conduct future home-school cooperation. This part mainly involves pre-service teachers' views on online home school communication, parent-teacher conference, parents' committee, home visit, parents' volunteers and parental involvement in decision-making.

3.4 Sources and influential factors of belief

Five themes emerged related to the sources and influences of belief formation among parents and teachers. These themes were personal primary and secondary school experiences, cases sharing with others, education in teacher training courses, news media coverage, and internship experiences. Otherwise, no patterns of responses were noted for any of the demographic characteristics of teachers.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The results of this study extend the extant literature in several ways. On the one hand, this study investigated Chinese pre-service teachers' perceptions of home-school cooperation and beliefs about the roles of parents and themselves, whereas most of the literature has focused on investigating the current state of home-school cooperation among in-service teachers. On the other hand, this study revealed the reasons for the formation of pre-service teachers' beliefs about home-school cooperation. This study focused not only on what the beliefs were but also wanted to understand why the beliefs were formed. This section discusses the interview findings in the context of the literature and the wider Chinese context.

First, pre-service teachers questioned that the dominant party towards home-school cooperation should be the teacher. They generally agreed that in order to achieve the goal of home-school cooperation, parents should make changes, and that someone should be responsible for educating parents to change their attitudes. But this task should preferably not be undertaken by teachers.

Second, pre-service teachers' beliefs of home-school cooperation reflect their understandings of teacher morality. In this study, the pre-service teachers showed their disapproval of over-sacrificing their self-rest time to devote to education. They frequently mentioned that home-school cooperation takes up their free time and can be extremely burdensome. And pre-service teachers attached great importance to the issue of the bottom line of teacher ethics in dealing with parents. Pre-service teachers pay special attention to demonstrating their professionalism in front of parents. Overall, pre-service teachers tended to favor self-protection as the main principle in their perceptions of home-school cooperation. This is different from the findings of existing studies. However, this does not mean that pre-service teachers are selfish and self-interested. This may be a consequence of the declining status of teachers and the lack of trust between parents and teachers caused by bad social trends such as parents' perception of teachers as service providers and the demonization of teachers by the media.

Third, almost all pre-service teachers have a negative perception of home visits, which is contrary to current policy advocacy in China. When it comes to home visits, pre-service teachers are very absolute in their attitudes, with expressions such as "it's not necessary", "it doesn't make much sense", "it's very negative", "I don't want to go", and so on. It is evident that pre-service teachers do not believe that home visits are the right thing to do and have a great deal of significance in this day and age.

In summary, as Bandura states, beliefs guide our goals, feelings, decisions, actions, and reactions more than truths. So it is more practical to acknowledge and act on this than to ignore and obscure pre-service teachers' true perceptions of home-school cooperation. Because the development of knowledge and skills about home-school cooperation is not yet well developed in the formal teacher education curriculum, it is difficult for pre-service teachers to break down their preexisting beliefs during the pre-service education process. And these beliefs come mainly from pre-service teachers' memories of their personal school days. Even when individuals reflect on home-school cooperation in response to certain news reports, they are prone to bias due to the lack of proper conceptual leadership. This fully shows that in the future, the field of teacher education in China needs to add home school cooperation theory and practice courses to guide pre-service teachers to form correct beliefs about home-school cooperation, to improve their theoretical literacy, to enhance their professionalism, and in order to minimize the arbitrariness in the formation of beliefs.

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