

Parents in the Classroom

This document was produced by Brett Rolfe. It collects workshop outputs from the ADEC Conference (October 2012), with thanks to the participants. This is part of an ongoing project to develop an education program to build parents' skills for participation in primary classrooms. To stay informed of the project progress, like us at facebook.com/ExemplarLearning or email me at brett@brettrolve.com

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Who are the parents currently spending time in classrooms?

- Mostly mums
- Not in full-time employment
- Generally parents of younger children (particularly K-2)
- Actively interested
- 'the involved, caring ones with time'

When and why are they there?

- Often closer to pick-up and drop-off time
- Sometimes rostered, sometimes around an event of interest, sometimes just turning up
- Invited by teachers, or proactively spoke to teachers to arrange a time
- Feel that they have something to contribute
- Concerned about making things happen or helping the teacher
- Have a desire to share their skills of interests

What are they currently doing?

- Things of interest to themselves (related to their profession or their passions)
- Things related to their children's interests
- Just playing and hanging out
- Playing games
- Facilitating reading
- One-on-one literacy support
- Assisting on excursions
- Offering other curricula (music, drama etc.)
- Observing, keeping an eye on what's happening
- Sharpening pencils
- Cooking
- Cleaning

WEIGHING UP THE BENEFITS

Positives of parents in the classroom

- Share life stories and backgrounds
- Builds network
- Changes kid's behaviour
- Broadens children's relationships
- Helps transitions
- Supports teachers
- Adds to curriculum
- Advocates
- Supports children
- Another listener
- Gives parents a more realistic idea of what's happening
- Gives parents a voice
- Grows parents' understanding of real learning (eg. Valuing play)
- Seeing other children gives parents perspective on their children
- Creates an engaging classroom climate
- Building relationships between parents and other people's children
- Extra available attention for children from adults
- Larger skillset and knowledge base
- For parents, an appreciation of what's going on, greater involvement in child's life, knowing own child better
- Parents becoming comfortable in the space

Negatives of parents in the classroom

- Without the 'full picture' parents may not understand what is happening in the classroom or may be judgemental
- Parents may feel 'out' and develop mistrust, fail to grow understanding
- Anxieties in kids (from change of routine)
- Child may behave differently when parent is present, often less willing to engage
- Parent taking over the classroom without necessary skills
- Uncertainty for parents knowing how to contribute
- Resentment from those parents that can't participate
- Added pressure for teachers
- Added pressure for kids
- May be a crutch for kids
- Infectious anxiety
- Changes kid's and teacher's behaviour

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The ideal scenario

- We should all be adults
- Supporting the kid's learning
- Philosophical match
- Parent education
- Trusting relationships
- Creating a community of learners
- Non-judgemental
- Respect both ways between teachers and parents
- Creating a safe inclusive environment for all
- Setting up the environment with easy rituals and a homely atmosphere to make a suitable 'culture'
- Scaffolding for parental involvement
- Parents enjoying playing with their children
- Parents sharing interests and passions in a way that fits with the school's values and philosophy
- Extension of home – ensures complimentary values and practices (eg. not doing worksheets at home)

Barriers to achieving this

- Parents own 'schooling' (negative experiences, shame, judgement)
- Teachers judging parents
- Teachers being inflexible
- Fear of criticism and judgement (for both teachers and parents)
- Cultural differences between teachers and parents
- Time poor parents
- Need for parents to de-school themselves, and let go of expectations about children's behaviour and their involvement
- Uncertainty of role and own skill
- Parental guilt regarding whether this is a proper and worthwhile use of their time
- Lack of effective communication
- Insecurities – of teachers, parents and children