

Positive Role for Parents' Day

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Educators at all levels of the education system agree that communication between the home and the school is critical to the academic success of students. In the local context, the annual Parents' Day is one mechanism that seeks to facilitate this collaborative effort by providing an opportunity for parents [and guardians] to become involved in their children's learning. With the recent start of the new and final term of the academic year, many schools will be hosting their Parents' Day and teachers will be expected to effectively facilitate the exercise.

While this exercise is conceptualised with the best of intentions as regards the intended benefits for students, teachers and parents are sometimes intimidated by Parents' Day and unsure about what they should say to each other. Teachers, in particular, are sometimes guilty of setting a negative tone right at the start by talking about failure rates in the class instead of the number of students who were successful; or by giving details about students' shortcomings instead of their achievements or improvements. This can often put parents on the defensive and can make the entire conference uncomfortable and tense for both teacher and parent, which may end up defeating the whole purpose of the exercise.

Research in this area has suggested that a positive tone should be set at the very beginning, by the teacher letting parents know that there are positive things to be said about their child. For teachers who are interacting with students on a daily basis, it should not be difficult to think of one or two positive things to say about each student. Things like, "your child is a hard worker and has improved upon....," or, "she is talented at... and particularly good at..." help to establish a positive tone early in the meeting. Having said some positive things, it is important that teachers remember to avoid immediately attaching BUT to the positive points made, because a negative statement immediately following may totally cancel out the positives that the teacher is trying to highlight.

For many students, there are indeed areas in which they can improve and teachers should use the opportunity to indicate these to parents. When a positive tone is established early in the meeting, parents are often more comfortable and open when teachers suggest things like, "your child needs help with..." or, "at times has difficulty with ...," or, "has a tendency to ...".

Teachers know that it is important for parents to be aware of the areas they need to work on with their child; however they often make the mistake of pointing out these areas (which may be the student's low academic performance or poor classroom behaviour) but not following up with possible solutions that may be adopted, or ways in which parents could be more supportive to their child. Teachers also need to be very careful to always compliment students and inform parents even when small improvements occur with the students.

It is a fact that in today's classrooms there are many students with "special needs," and therefore it is very important that these meetings be used to identify any such special needs that the child may have and what could be done, by parents and teachers, to address these needs in order to make the learning experience [at school and at home] meaningful and accessible to the child.

It should be remembered by all involved that the overall outcome of every parent-teacher meeting should be a strengthening of the team spirit as parents, teacher, and student work towards a common goal—high-quality education for the student.

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