

BUILDING SYNERGY BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS: A CHANNEL FOR HOLISTIC EDUCATION

Paper presented by Prof. 'Tola Badejo, the Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University of Science and Technology, Ondo at the 2014 Principals/Vice principals Workshop held in the Take-Off Campus of Wesley University from Tuesday July 29 to Thursday July 31, 2014.

The Concept of Synergy

The word 'synergy' was derived from the Greek word 'synergia' which means "working together". Synergy could be described as working together as a team or a group with a view to be more successful compared to working alone or separately. It is a kind of interaction between many components of a system aimed at providing greater results than the sum of the contributions of each.

The Concept of Holistic

Holistic is a concept that is based on some principles of treating or handling issues as a whole rather than just a segment. In essence, a Holistic Education is achieved through a multi-focused approach to the different educational levels and programmes and the means through which the objectives of the programmes at different levels could be well achieved.

The Principal

Who is a school principal?

The principal is the chief executive of a secondary school, who is saddled with numerous responsibilities or roles having established procedures that are targeted towards the accomplishment of the objectives of the school. Some of the numerous roles of the school principal include:

- (i) **Students personnel services**
- (ii) **Staff personnel services**
- (iii) **School business administration**
- (iv) **Development, implementation and evaluation of programmes**
- (v) **Parents and community relations**

The Parents

Parents as stakeholders in education are expected to do the following:

- (i) be a role model for learning
- (ii) practice what the child learns at school
- (iii) set aside time to read together
- (iv) learn something new themselves
- (v) prepare the children for the school
- (vi) make provision of school needs for the children
- (vii) communicate well with the school
- (viii) ensure that adequate monitoring is given to the relationship between their children and their peers.
- (ix) reduce spending too much time on watching television and engaging in social networks to a minimum

The process of building the synergy between principals and parents for holistic education requires that there is supposed to be an efficient and effective school community relationship in the following ways:

- (i) an understanding between the school and the community (principals and parents) in terms of the contents of the learning package (curriculum).
- (ii) an understanding between the two stake holders (principals and parents) on how to reinforce funds from other sources apart from school fees.
- (iii) an understanding as regards the appropriate or suitable environment (site selection) where the school is expected to operate.
- (iv) an understanding on the admission parameters of the school to avoid a situation where community members will become less privileged.

Rationale for synergy building between Principals and Parents

- (i) Through collaborative effects, the school and the community would be able to fashion out an acceptable alternative means of providing funds for the operations of the school.
- (ii) Through the synergy, all decisions that affects the '*modus operandi*' of the school could be jointly taken by the principal and the parents.
- (iii) The synergy between principals and parents could go a long way towards checkmating or curbing the disruptive behaviour of the students.
- (iv) A harmonious relationship between the principals and parents could be a panacea as regards shortage of facilities and equipments in the school.

Afolabi (1998) explained that school community relations is a mutual interaction between the school and the community whereby they gave mutual help and understanding from each other as well as being fully aware of one another's activities, policies, plans, programmes, problems, progress and failures.

Factors that can enhance synergy for Holistic Education

The accomplishment of educational objectives requires that all hands must be on deck. In other words, everybody must participate fully. In essence, principals and parents as key stakeholders are expected to display as interwoven entities that rely on the efforts of one another to actualize the pre-determined objectives of the school. If the required synergy is expected to take place, the situation requires the following:

- (i) the principal as a school administrator or head is expected to reflect the needs of the community in the school curriculum. When this happens, school leavers could be more useful to their various communities.
- (ii) the principal should maintain an open-door policy which will encourage parents to have reasonable access to his office thereby closing communication gap and also creating room for a better solid interaction.
- (iii) the principal is expected to inform and invite parents to school programmes and activities like interhouse sports, send forth programmes, orientation programmes, debate and so on.
- (iv) the principal is expected to make the school facilities available for the use of the parents or the community for social engagements, religious activities, educational activities and so on. The school hall, playing fields, classrooms etc. could be made available to the community on demand with a levy that will be acceptable to both parties.

- (v) the community is expected to serve as resource bank to the school to create room for a better relationship.
- (vi) the community through Parents' Teachers Association (PTA), philanthropists, agencies, religious organizations, corporate bodies, old students are expected to raise the standard of the school through the provision of funds, materials, scholarships and facilities.

Likely obstacles to synergy between Principals and Parents

Synergy between principals and parents for holistic education are not likely to be feasible where the following factors operate:

- (i) The principal playing partisan politics. In essence, the administrator's political opponents who are parents and members of the community may not be prepared for assistance in the school that can enhance a holistic education.
- (ii) The principal depriving parents and members of the community from using school facilities for social, religious and academic activities.
- (iii) If the principal is autocratic in his/her approaches to issues, it is likely to create a set back in the process of building a synergy between the school and the community for a holistic education.
- (iv) Where there is communication gap between the principals and parents, the programmes and activities of the school may not be known to the community. As a result, the level of assistance from the community to such school may not be encouraging.

The role of Parents Teachers Association (PTA)

Blishen (1970), traced the origin of PTA to 1866, when the value of parent/teacher-cooperation was becoming apparent, and a national organization to further this co-operation was formed in Holland. In 1897, the national congress of mothers was founded in Washington D.C and in 1924 it became the national congress of parents and teachers.

PTA is a voluntary association of parents and teachers. This concept of internal grouping arrangement tends to facilitate good school/community relationship. Parents are opportuned to understand what exists in the school their wards attend and the constraints experienced in the course of carrying out the administrative and instructional functions in the school. In Nigeria, PTA is backed by law in some states making it compulsory for parents and teachers, while in other states it is voluntary. Whichever way, parents mandatorily pay levies agreed by the association or their wards attendance in that particular school (Igwe, 1999).

In Nigeria, according to (Okunola, 1971), the PTA which today exists in virtually every school in the country, is an ideal organization, the activities of which could be channeled to very useful purposes. Instances are known of parents who have willingly subscribed to erect school buildings to accommodate school children. Abadina village school, University of Ibadan, is an outstanding example.

The only way the principal can have effective partnership with parents in tackling the responsibilities of education of a child is through effective and functional PTA.

The Objectives of PTA

According to Moroe (1952), Haskew 1962 and Blishen (1970), an ideal PTA must have the following objectives.

- (a) Giving members understanding of the objectives and methods of the school.
- (b) Learning to apply accepted educational objectives and methods to the out-of-school environment.
- (c) Under certain conditions, giving school officials opinions as to where the school succeeds or fails.
- (d) To provide an opportunity for both parents and teachers to study the new development in child psychology which related to the upbringing and the education of the child as a whole.
- (e) Since the child receives its education in home, school and community, the duty of P.T.A is to seek the promotion of the co-operation between home and school, and their joint efforts to secure in the community school conditions as will supplement the best instruction given by the parents and teachers for the development of whole child in all of these relationships.
- (f) To strengthen the role of parents in the educational pattern.
- (g) To give physical, financial and technical assistance to the activities of the school where such support do not conflict with the other government agencies (or private concerns) responsible for the administration of the schools.
- (h) To help the school administrators to resolve complex issues related to the students discipline or delinquency of the school's operational facilities or services or major cultural conflicts in school curriculum.

A more than cursory look at the objectives of PTA will reveal that they are all centered on the synergy between home and school. Any principal who wants synergy between him and the parents of his students must carry out all these objectives judiciously.

Unfortunately the situation currently is that most principals lay more emphasis on financial assistance from PTA (objective g). This has reduced the morale of some parents from coming to PTA meetings where all discussions are based on raising funds.

While asking for financial assistance from parents may not be out of place in poorly funded public schools, it is highly out of place in private schools where parents pay school fees. Parents should never be made to bear the burden of the proprietors (Ugwulashi, 2012) because in the strict sense, a private school is supposed to be a business venture that should generate funds for the proprietor on the long run.

Students' discipline and the implications on moral regeneration

There is no doubt that parental influence on the education of the child is gradually disappearing. This is why parents should be encouraged to develop greater interest in the process of education and influence educational decision making through their participation in the PTA (Adesina, 1980).

The education of a child should be a synergy between the home and school. Parents should be encouraged to cooperate with the school to bring the best out of the child (Brai, 2014).

Parents are the most important stakeholders in the school. It is a pertinent fact that they have to play an important role in their children's education. Their practice/cooperation is instrumental to giving the child a meaningful role in the outside world that he/she has to step out into (Najimu, 2014).

A very important aspect of a principal's job is students' discipline. Discipline, according to Adesina (1980) can be defined as readiness or ability to respect authority and observe conventional or established laws of the society or of any other organization. It implies self-control, restraint, respect of self, and respect for others. It calls also for sacrifice, perseverance, tolerance and recognition of human dignity. The primary purpose of synergy between the principal and parents of a child is to mould him/her to develop respect for himself/herself, the school authorities and regulations, his/her parents and the society at large. In looking at the future of discipline in schools, there must be synergy between the principals/teachers and parents of the students i.e all involved must play their roles in maintaining discipline instead of shifting the blame to any of the parties involved.

Child's first educational experience begins from the home and this is where the role of the parents cannot be over emphasized. Parents ought to inculcate into their children not only accepted social habits of the society but also the acceptable norms of behaviour. Parents are supposed to be role models for their children to develop the same way as teachers. Many acts of indiscipline among students today like examination malpractices, stealing, drug abuse, students' unrest, fighting, taking alcohol, smoking etc. are due to negligence on the part of their parents. The home and school must cooperate together to discipline the students. Parents guiding their children concerning the type of literature their children read, censoring films they watch in order to afford the ones that could corrupt their minds.

Any act of indiscipline by a student in school should be made known immediately to the parents for them to agree together to punish and mould the child. A situation where parents come to the school to harass the principal and teachers and sometimes go to the extent of arresting them with policemen is abnormal. Moral regeneration which all faith-based schools are committed to cannot be achieved unless parents cooperate with teachers in curbing acts of indiscipline.

Importance of Home work and Assignments in residential schools.

Walberg (1984) and Yearly (1978) both stress the influence of parents on Home-work as a form of supervision. Walberg sees homework as an obvious but neglected ingredient in learning. According to him, the amount, quality and usefulness of home-work is jointly determined by educators, parents and students.

Parents can be a great ally of the teacher and the school if they follow and monitor home-work (Yearly, 1978). Parents should make sure that they supervise their children's assignments and inculcate in them the reading habit especially with so many technological gadgets to distract them like computer, surfing the internet, watching films indiscriminately, etc., which can take most of their time if care is not taken. Parents should have time to supervise them in deference to devoting more time for running after materials and money. Even homes where parents are not all that educated to supervise their children assignments and reading habits, part-time teachers should be engaged.

For schools with boarding facilities, assignments have replaced home work. Parents may not be directly involved but they will be delighted to know that assignments are given to their

wards to keep them busy out-of class. This is usually done during preparatory self study periods after school. Any school which does not devote at least four hours a day to preparatory periods during which students study on their own, do assignments etc., cannot be said to be serious about provision of participatory quality education. This should be able to fit perfectly into the standard norm of eight hours of serious work, eight hours of rest (less strenuous work) and eight hours of sleep in the daily 24 hour cycle.

Conclusion

One important effect of synergy between the principal and the parent is the establishment of partnerships between the school and home for a viable approach to educational improvement. Such partnerships increase the resources available to education since parents and other interested adults contribute time and psychic support to the instructional process, both in the school and in the home. This type of synergy makes the student a centre of relationship between the principal and the parents and each one of them will play his own role to enhance the child's likelihood for success and to provide what is best mode of upbringing for the nation's young people.

Parents do not appreciate stern faced professionalism from principals as they would appreciate the "personal touch". Principals are not likely to earn parents' respect by adhering to a cold, businesslike approach (Lindle, 1989).

Building synergy between principals and parents for holistic education emphasizes a sound relationship between the school and the community. The realization or the accomplishment of the synergy centers around the ability of the school principal as an administrator to romance or relate very well with the community using the appropriate leadership style at the appropriate time. Akabogu, Alice and Ukeje (1992) maintained that the quality of leadership in an organization, be it religious, social, business, military or otherwise affects to a large extent, the success or failure of that organization.

Recommendations

My five point declaration towards the building of synergy between the principals and parents for a holistic education are as follows:

- Principals should study people and the nature of the environment where the school is situated so as to determine some of their characteristics that can hinder effective school community relations.
- Principals should try to maintain an open policy that will not completely prevent parents or members of the community from having access to them.
- Principals should not cripple the PTA, rather, they should give the association the required support to be more active and be sensitive to the needs and the aspirations of the school.
- Principals should always give parents the personal touch on all matters concerning school development and students' discipline.
- Effective educational administration demands that adequate consideration be given to how to build a synergy between the school and the community to create a channel for holistic education. This can only be achieved if the principal has effective **organizational management skills** which according to Grissom and Loeb (2011) have been identified as a combination of skills, among others, that a principal must have to be able to promote the school's success. I am of the opinion that this skill is largely inborn but it can also be acquired through training and experience.

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