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Communication and Listening as the Methods of Collaborative Partnerships with,
Child's Parents, Early Childhood Teacher and Early Childhood Children
การทำงานร่วมกันระหว่าง ผู้ปกครอง ผู้สอนเด็กปฐมวัย และเด็กปฐมวัยโดยการสื่อสาร
และการรับฟัง

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify the term of collaborative partnerships and exemplify and analyze effective approaches for collaborative partnerships. With regards to New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, collaborative partnerships between early childhood (EC) sectors (including EC centres and teachers), EC children, child's parents are significant to support child's learning and development as well as support the child's parents' well-being. Hence, the curriculum encourages EC centres and teachers to create partnerships with the EC children, their parents. The collaborative partnerships allow the EC sectors to learn and understand the needs, interests and background of each child as well as their parents. This information assists the EC teachers to support the child's learning. Although there are a number of ways that the EC sectors can create relationship and collaborate with the EC children and their parents. This article will exemplify two approaches which can result in effective collaboration comprising communication and listening. Although these methods are efficient, there are some barriers limiting child's parents to communicate with the EC teachers.

Keywords: Child's parents, Collaborative Partnerships, Communication and Listening, Early Childhood Teacher

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของบทความนี้คืออธิบายความหมายของการทำงานร่วมกัน (collaborative partnerships) ระหว่างศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กปฐมวัย คุณครู เด็กปฐมวัย และผู้ปกครองของเด็ก โดยยกตัวอย่างและวิเคราะห์ 2 วิธีการทำงานร่วมกันระหว่างทุกภาคส่วน หลักสูตรการศึกษาเด็กปฐมวัยของประเทศนิวซีแลนด์ให้ความสำคัญด้านการทำงานร่วมกันระหว่างศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กปฐมวัย คุณครูในศูนย์ฯ เด็กปฐมวัย ผู้ปกครองและครอบครัวของเด็ก เพื่อสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้และพัฒนาการของเด็ก รวมถึงเป็นการช่วยเหลือผู้ปกครองของเด็กให้มีความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีขึ้น ดังนั้นหลักสูตรฯ จึงมุ่งเน้นให้ศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กปฐมวัยและคุณครูสร้างความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีกับเด็กปฐมวัย ผู้ปกครองของเด็ก ทั้งนี้ การทำงานร่วมกันกับเด็กและผู้ปกครองจะช่วยทางศูนย์ฯ ได้เรียนรู้และเข้าใจถึงความต้องการ ความสนใจ และพื้นฐานหรือภูมิหลังของเด็ก และผู้ปกครอง ข้อมูลเหล่านี้สามารถช่วยคุณครูประกอบการวางแผนการเรียนการสอนให้แก่เด็กๆ และการได้มาซึ่งข้อมูลเหล่านี้สามารถทำได้หลายวิธี โดยในบทความนี้กล่าวถึง 2 วิธีการที่มีประสิทธิภาพ คือการสื่อสารและการรับฟัง แม้ว่าทั้ง 2 วิธีนี้มีประสิทธิภาพ อย่างไรก็ตามผู้ปกครองของเด็กก็มีเหตุผลและอุปสรรคที่ไม่ต้องการสื่อสารกับคุณครู

คำสำคัญ: การทำงานร่วมกัน, การสื่อสารและการรับฟัง, ผู้ปกครอง, ผู้สอนเด็กปฐมวัย

Introduction

According to the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2017), collaborative partnerships between early childhood sectors, young children, child's parents and families has been promoted in order to support children's learning and well-being. This has guided early childhood centres and teachers to create partnerships with young children, their parents and families (Dalli, 2012; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). Thus, it is essential for early childhood centres to gain information regarding early childhood children, their parents and families in order to create relationship and develop collaborative partnership (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). Likewise, according to Thailand Ministry of Education (2017), it is stated that educational institutions and related sectors should prepare for children's learning by collaborating with the child's parents in order to support their child's learning and development. This could assist the child to grow up strongly and to be ready with the rapid global change. Additionally, the early childhood education (Thailand Ministry of Education, 2017) states that all children have the rights to be raised properly and supported their learning. Such supports require collaboration from the child's parents and EC teachers or caretakers. Thus, it is significant for the EC centres to collaborate with the child's parents, communities, and those who engage in EC education in order to share knowledge and understanding regarding the EC development. It is clearly seen EC education of both New Zealand and Thailand highlights on the collaborative partnerships between EC sectors, child's parents and families, communities, young children, and related sectors.

Thus, this article is going to provide the term of collaborative partnerships and describe two approaches which can result in effective collaboration between EC educators, young children, children's parents and families which include communication and listening (Amatea et al., 2006; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Keyser, 2017; Stonehouse, 2011). This article aims to clarify the term of

collaborative partnerships in New Zealand's early childhood context and exemplify and analyze effective approaches for collaborative partnerships.

Collaborative partnerships

To begin with, in accordance with Cambridge University Press (2023), collaborative means “involving two or more people or organizations working together for a particular purpose”. Partnership is defined as “an agreement between organizations or people to work together” (Cambridge University Press, 2023). In addition, defines a term collaboration and partnership as follows: “Collaboration is people working side by side on a joint endeavour”. states that “a process of collaboration enhances people to negotiate, make a decision, share common goals, and communicate over time”. For partnerships, describes that partnerships are formed between individuals who develop their personal relationships which can be in a way of helping each other and exchanging different views or experiences. Thus, collaborative partnerships in an early childhood (EC) context can be defined as an interaction and relationship between EC educators, young children, child's parents and families with an aim to support the child's learning while personal relationship is created over time. Therefore, partnerships mainly comprise EC children, their parents and families, and EC centres and staff. (Saltiel , 1998)

Early childhood (EC) ranges from birth to the age of six years old including infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergartens (Keyser, 2017; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2023). They are an important age group since they are at the developmental stage of their lives and are considered as vulnerable (Keyser, 2017; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2023; Nimmo, 1998). Additionally, each child is unique (Carr & Lee, 2012; Nimmo, 1998). They have their characteristic, skills, interests, knowledge, and experiences. Each child is constructed by their parents and family, people around them, family's culture, school, and environment (Amatea et al, 2006; Carr & Lee, 2012; May, 2013; Nimmo, 1998). Child's life events and stories are created by their parents, family members such as family's culture, daily routine, religious activity, family celebration, etc. (Nimmo, 1998). Certainly, parents know their children better than others (Amatea et al, 2006; May, 2013). “Families are the most important people in children's lives” (Stonehouse, 2011). Thus, in this context, parents have a role to support their child's interest, make a decision, learning and development (Te One, 2011).

In an early childhood (EC) sector, there are workers who engage in taking care and assisting young children for learning and development. Many terms for these staff have been used including EC teachers, professionals, caretakers, caregivers, and educators. A purpose of EC centres and staff mainly aims to support children's learning and development as well as support family positive outcomes (New Zealand Ministry of Education, n.d.). In order to effectively achieve the goals, EC sectors cannot work alone since it requires a wide range of practices and parental participations (Dalli, 2012).

To encourage the young children, their parents and families engaging in the child's learning and development, collaborate partnerships between early childhood teachers, young children and their parents are the foundation of the early childhood learning (Dalli, 2012; Keyser, 2017; New Zealand Ministry of

Education, n.d.; Munford et al., 2007) together with establishing collaborative partnerships between these partners and respond to each family due to cultural diversity provide positive outcomes in child development and family welfare (Clarkin-Phillips, 2012; New Zealand Ministry of Education, n.d.; Munford et al., 2007; Nimmo, 1998; Stonehouse, 2011). With these reasons, collaborative partnerships are vital.

Collaborative partnerships with child's parents and families can be done in several ways including having communication, listening to young children and parents, respect all children and parents, being empathy, providing orientation before and during the child care, encouraging parents to ask and discuss, enhancing parents to enjoy childrearing, asking parents to take part in decision making about their child's experiences, establishing strong connections with all parents, and assisting parents in resolving conflicts (Amatea et al., 2006; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Keyser, 2017; Stonehouse, 2011). This article emphasizes on two principles, namely communication and listening. These approaches can effectively assist collaborative partnerships between EC educators, young children, children's parents and families.

Communication with early childhood children, their parents and families

Communication with young children and parents is noteworthy and is one way to create partnerships with them (Amatea et al, 2006; Carr & Lee, 2012; Dalli, 2012; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Keyser, 2017; May, 2013). In this article, communication refers to two-way conversation which can be either formal or informal depending on situations; for example, a conversation at classroom meeting or parent interview is formal at many schools while a conversation at school party tends to be informal (May, 2013). Having dialogues with child's parents and families involves exchanging and updating information regarding their young children (Carr & Lee, 2012; Keyser, 2006). Grey (2011) and Dalli (2012) suggest that dialogue can build interaction between teachers, young children and their parents in an EC setting which allows each partner to inform while teachers can develop their teaching practices. For instance, the EC teachers can learn about children's lives at home such as child's behavior, their hobby and interest, before and after school activities, tasks and duties at home, family's culture, and family aspiration and expectation (Amatea et al, 2006; Carr & Lee, 2012; Duncan et al., 2012; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; May, 2013). This information assists the EC teachers to plan and design what types of play and learning are suitable to the children in order to produce meaningful learning outcomes (Duncan et al., 2012).



Figure 1 Two-way conversation with child's parents (Illinois Early Learning Project, 2024)

Following this, communicating with the parents allows the teachers to inquire into and explore the parents and their child's story (Echevarria-Doan, 2001; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018). This extends the EC teacher's ideas on parent's perceptions, aims, beliefs on their children rearing, and experiences (Amatea et al., 2006). This background greatly supports the teachers to understand the parents and their goal (Amatea et al., 2006; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Keyser, 2017). Amatea et al. (2006) advocate that EC teachers can develop children's skills, particularly when they know parenting style. Thus, they can offer suitable learning activities and develop social skills for the children (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018). For example, to know that children are assigned to do home tasks allows the educators to recognize that children may be taught about leadership skills, timing, and problem solving (Amatea et al., 2006). A prime example is one of the cases in New Zealand as the country has diverse population coming from different countries with different socio-cultural background. The findings of Cooper & Hedges (2014) showing that when these newcomers bring their young children to attend an EC centre in New Zealand, the EC teachers have conversations with the child's parents as well as learn the child's family culture over time. Following this, the EC teachers encourage the young children and their family to share their interest, culture, and practices at the centre. This leads to positive outcomes. Firstly, this makes the child and their family feel proud of their culture and are willing to participate with the EC centre activities. Next, other young children at the EC centre have an opportunity to learn and exchange cultural experiences. Such activities lead to reciprocal relationship between the EC centre and the child's parents which later supports the child's learning and development. Moreover, this leads to the EC curriculum development such as play-based curriculum. As we can see, these are the benefits from having conversations between the EC teachers and the child's parents.

In terms of adverse experiences, sharing bad experiences through conversation with EC teachers can benefit child's parents in many ways. Firstly, EC teachers could help parents to reduce stress and turn such situations into a positive view (Amatea et al., 2006; Walsh, 2008). For example, (Amatea et al., 2006). some mothers do not work because they want to spend time on childrearing. Some of them feel guilty of not working. The EC teachers suggest that this is not wrong but it is admirable that the mother sacrifices their time to raise the child Next, discussion on child's circumstance and family's situation allows both EC teachers and parents to know the child's behavior and performance at home and school For instance, some children have emotional influences and behavior due to parental divorces. Some parents may find it is difficult to manage with the kids Therefore, the EC teachers could provide suggestion to the child and parents. Consequently, this creates collaboration between the teachers and parents to find ways to cope with the child's feeling. Nevertheless, Walsh (2008) argues that people tend to share negative experiences with intimate partners, family members, or teachers who are able to assist them or believe in their potential.

Some topics of the young children could be difficult for the EC staffs to inform and communicate with the child's parents. This paragraph exemplifies how the EC staffs could converse with the parents with

a topic of a child developmental delay. (Thailand Ministry of Public Health, 2018) states that communication is not only informing but it also requires empathy from the EC teachers. It is significant to observe the parent's expression and situations. Hence, to inform the child's parents regarding the child's developmental delay, some techniques are needed for the EC teachers to talk to the parents. It is advised that the EC staff should start the conversation by greeting and admiring the child's parents that they take their kid to attend class. Following this, the EC teacher could inform the parents in a nice way such as telling the parents what the child does well and what the parents have supported the child at home. Then, it is essential to observe the parent's expression which then the EC teacher could express the empathy to them by cheering up and encouraging the parents to support their child's development.

It is obvious that two-way communication can lead to better understanding between partners. As we can see, the conversations allow the EC teachers to know and understand child's parents and families; meanwhile, the parents can feel acknowledged and valued (Keyser, 2017; May, 2013; Rinaldi, 2001, Duncan et al., 2012) suggest that sharing information and discussion with the teachers help parents understand teacher's roles not only to educate and develop child learning but also to support parenting (Amatea et al., 2006). This is relevant to Kongchum et al. (2020) stating that parents have a pivotal role to support child's development, neuro response as well as mental health while EC centres have an important role to support the parents by providing consultation or educating parents relating to childrearing. It is essential for both EC teachers and child's parents to have conversations with the EC children, listen to them, and allow them to express their opinions. Kettanom (2024) argues that some parents think that an EC centre is responsible for educating their child regarding grooming and behavior. It is necessary for the child's parents to engage in supporting their child's development. Moreover, Thai culture highlights on social grooming, social rules, and being responsible. These need to be delivered to the EC children. Affirms that communications between the EC teachers, EC children and the child's parents could support the child's behavior and build awareness on ethics such as recognizing what is right or wrong, not lying, being faith, and helping others. In addition to the communication, it is essential to respect and communicate openly with parents so that the parent do not feel that they are judged (Amatea et al., 2006; Dalli, 2012; Ritchie, 2010; Stonehouse; 2011).

Furthermore, it is important to communicate with early childhood (EC) children. Communication is underpinned to create relationship with the EC children (Brennan, 2007; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). Having conversation with children is an opportunity for the EC teachers to seek children's story at home, people who they contact with, and their experiences (Carr & Lee, 2012). Children's stories allow the teachers to connect their stories at home and school. Hence, the EC teachers can recognize what children are thinking, their interest and preference, emotion, situation, dreams and even feelings toward the EC center (Amatea et al., 2006). This provides many positive outcomes (Amatea et al., 2006; Duncan et al., 2012). For instance, the EC teachers could share this information to parents in order to collaborate and find ways to support and develop their children. This helps to build home-centre

connections and communication. In addition, when parents clearly understand about their child's learning, they tend to increase participation at the early childhood center (Duncan et al., 2012).

Listening to early childhood children, their parents and families

In addition to the communication, listening is an effective method to enhance collaborative partnerships because of several reasons. It is noticeable that listening is basis for creating connection between one person to another, understanding our partners, and leading to better collaboration (Keyser, 2017; Rinaldi, 2001; Simpson et al., 2017). Being a good listener and paying attention to the young children, their parents and families can make them feel that they are listened and responded (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Keyser, 2017). Prior to listen, the EC teachers should be open to diverse children and families as well as acknowledge the value of others (Keyser, 2017). This leads to better connection between the EC teachers, children and their parents.

Furthermore, listening provides practical and in-depth information to the EC teachers. To start with, it is noticeable that listening to the parents and families allows the EC teachers to acknowledge parent's stories or barriers about their child's learnings, the support that parents need, their expectations on their child's learning, and parenting problems (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Munford et al., 2007). This information allows the EC teachers to understand the issues which occur with the child's parents. Moreover, listening to child's parents allows EC teachers to provide knowledge which is practical for the parents to support their child. Therefore, many EC teachers develop plans and strategies to be appropriate with the child's learning either at school or at home as well as assist parents (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018; Munford et al., 2007). Additionally, (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2018) suggests that it is essential for the EC teachers to balance the conversations by listening more and respond to child's parents. Such conversations may include their family's stories and parent's opinions on their child's learning. For instance, listening to parents who experience financial hardship allow the EC teachers to assist and plan for their child's learning since the insufficient budget can affect the child's learning. With this situation in New Zealand, some EC centres support skillful parents by asking them to engage the casual work at the nursery. As a consequence, parents become more comfortable and confident when the teachers listen to them (Munford et al., 2007; Stonehouse, 2011). Further than that, listening to child's parents allows EC teachers to recognize either young children or their parent's emotions in which the teacher could respond to them appropriately such as helping them to calm down from the unhappy situations that they face. Thus, this could lead to better collaborative partnerships with the child's parents and families. Significantly, New Zealand Education Review Office (2018) reveals that parents and families usually share negative experiences to the EC teachers who intend to listen and concentrate on their child. Even though listening is vital to all partners, (Rinaldi, 2001, p3) argues that "Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and a suspension of our judgements and prejudices. It requires openness to change. It demands that we value the unknown." Although listening is one significant principle of collaborative partnerships, listeners should be aware of the stories whether some stories are true (Rinaldi, 2001). Thus,

interpretation is essential along with listening. This is compatible with (Thailand Ministry of Public Health, 2018) asserting that listening is not only to hear but it also requires the EC teachers or EC staffs to pay attention and understand the speaker's messages and feelings.

Moving on to EC children, listening to the EC children makes them feel positive and valued (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017; Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 2021). This age group starts to learn talking and develop their communication skill; therefore, they talk much and ask many questions (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). It's crucial for the teachers to listen carefully and respect the children's voices when the children communicate and show them that the teachers are listening (Dalli, 2012; Grey, 2011; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017; Nimmo, 1998; Ritchie, 2010; Te One, 2011). Generally, the early year children start to communicate by non-verbal communication which includes facial expression, body language, tone of voice, and eye contact; therefore, it is necessary for the EC teachers to listen and pay attention to children's behavior (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017; Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 2021). Likewise, (Rinaldi, 2001, p2) suggests that "listening should recognize the many languages, symbols and codes that people use in order to express themselves and communicate". For instance, children under two years old are incapable to communicate verbally. When they cry, caretakers must find out why the children cry and how to make the children get back to a normal condition. Listening attentively to the children and their parents not only allows the EC teachers to learn children's histories, present situations, possible future scenarios but also perceive children and families' emotion and needs (Rinaldi, 2001). On the one hand, (Te One, 2011; Simpson et al., 2017) advocate that listening to all children allows the EC teachers to learn and understand about differences as well as concern about how to encourage the children to participate in EC education. For instance, (Simpson et al., 2017) claim that listening to children in poverty extends an understanding of the EC teachers on children's vulnerability, diverse socio-economic and cultural differences, their limited access to educational resources, and their interests. This allows the EC teachers to establish "a shared-focus, co-construction, and meaning-making" with the children. Then the EC teachers will need to find ways to support their inclusion, and learning and development. As we can see, a result of attentive listening and responding to children and their parents could support children's learning as well as parent and family well-being (Dalli, 2012; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017).

Discussion

In addition to the two-way communication and listening, even though there are other methods to communicate with the young children and child's parents such as posting an announcement on a notice board at the EC centre and sending out a newsletter to the child's parents, these approaches are not as efficient as the two-way communication. Since it is a one-way communication, it is difficult for the EC centres to recognize whether the young children or the parents acknowledge such information. Also, not all parents visit the EC centres; therefore, there are chances for them not to receive such messages. On the one hand, the EC teachers could not recognize the respond or opinions from the parents as well as

exchange knowledges and points of views. Therefore, these approaches are less likely to support effective collaborative partnership. Furthermore, the findings in Thailand of Kongchum et al (2020) advocate that it is important for the EC centres to arrange a meeting with child's parents in each semester as well as encourage them to share ideas and recommendations on child's learning and development which is relevant to (Early childhood development Thailand, 2022; Kettanom, 2024) who confirms that the EC centre should arrange a teacher-parent meeting day. This could help to communicate and remind the parents about the EC centre's policy and guidelines of supporting the EC development

Although it is obvious that communication benefits young children's learning and supports the child's parents, there are some barriers for parents to have conversations with the EC teachers. (Amatea et al., 2006) affirm that personal emotions and busy lives cause parents having limited communication with the EC teachers. Similarly, Kettanom (2024) states that the barriers limiting the Thai parents to communicate with the EC centre such as time limitation due to parent's work hours. In addition, undesirable past experiences and beliefs are also major obstacles for the child's parents to have a conversation with the EC educators. For instance, some parents are called from the teachers when their children are in difficulty. Thus, parents tend to be worried and feel that they are unable to teach their children (Amatea et al., 2006). Further than that, some ethnic and immigrant parents are not confident with their sociocultural background and language barrier (Amatea et al., 2006; Guo, 2012). Hence, they tend to avoid talking to their child's teachers. Meanwhile, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) assert that some parents believe that they have their own way to develop their child's learning; therefore, they do not highly engage with schools. In contrast, the study of showing that the child's parents who have different ages and educational background tend to take different actions and responses towards the EC centres (Kettanom, 2024). For example, the parents with lower education may not understand about childrearing and they tend to spend less time with their child and communicate with the EC teachers. Thus, these are some reasons that cause parents do not want to visit the schools and communicate with the teachers.

In terms of listening, it is clearly shown that attentive listening can support collaborative partnerships between the EC teachers, early childhood children, their parents and families. Basically, it allows EC teachers to learn and understand all parties. Nevertheless, (Rinaldi, 2001) advocates that listeners need to consider whether the stories which were told are true. Thus, interpretation is also important in line with listening. This is compatible with (Thailand Ministry of Public Health, 2018) stating listening is not only hearing. It requires attention, empathy and understanding the speakers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, collaborative partnerships provide positive outcomes to all partners. An aim of the partnerships is to support children's learning and development as well as child's parent and family well-being. As described earlier, it is noticeable that collaborative partnerships between EC teachers, EC children and their parents and families not only influence in children's learning and development but also assist child's parents to gain more knowledge on child rearing and solving some issues regarding their

child's learning and development. In this article, the author provides some communication practices in New Zealand and Thailand. They share some similarities such as the ideas and the significance of communication between EC teachers, EC children, and the child's parents. However, they are slightly different. EC education practices in New Zealand emphasize on the diverse socio-cultural background of EC children and their families and how the communication could support the EC children and their parents to gain benefits from EC education as New Zealand has diverse population and ethnics. In terms of EC education in Thailand, there is a concern on culture, social rules, responsibility and the readiness for the EC children to live with the rapid change of the society. New Zealand has a good practice on supporting diverse EC children in which Thailand EC sectors could apply with the EC children in terms of delving into the EC children's stories at home and their family story and background. This could assist all parties to understand one another and ultimately support the EC children's learning and development. Although there are some different concerns between New Zealand and Thailand EC education, two approaches for collaborative partnerships comprising communication and listening are vital. These methods are effective and can be promptly practiced among the EC partners. Last but not least, communication is not only informing. It requires empathy as well.

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