

## PARENTS-TEACHERS ASSOCIATION: A TOOL IN COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF BIOLOGY EDUCATION

IWU R.U, AZORO A V., ONOJA A. I and CHINAKA .A.

Department of Biology, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri Imo State.

Corresponding Email Address: [rosykachi@yahoo.com](mailto:rosykachi@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT:** All over the world Parents Teachers Association (PTA) is seen as a potent factor in the achievement of objectives for uplifting science education. Parents' involvement in educational policies promotes a healthy and consistent learning environment by establishing mutual goals between parents and teachers and developing activities that bridge the home and the school. Parents – teachers programmes actively engage parents and teachers through a variety of activities that enable them participate actively in decision making, strict implementation of the curriculum and instilling of discipline in students. These activities have gone a long way in increasing students' success in science subjects. The study suggested among other things: involvement of parents and teachers in decision making in the school, supplying information about children's progress to parents regularly and organization of conferences for PTA members.

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### INTRODUCTION

All over the world, science and technology education are accepted as indisputable agents for the achievement of national development.

The collaborative involvement of Parents-Teachers Association means partnership between the school personnel and the youth who attend schools, the parents who are their primary educators and advocates, the broader families who nurture them and the leaders of the communities in which they grow in designing, developing, monitoring and coordinating school health programmes. Biology is an activity oriented subject which requires that students be placed in a problem solving situation surrounded by suitable materials to interact with so that they can make meaning out of the interaction (Ndiho, 2007). The provision of these materials for students requires the collaborative effort of both parents and teachers to achieve the set objectives. The PTA could help in the provision of materials by

1. Donating fund to school to purchase the necessary biology equipment,
2. Buying and donating science materials to the school biology laboratory,
3. Encourage students to assist the biology teacher in collection of specimens that are present in the locality,

4. Providing learning materials such as pencils, drawing books, ruler, eraser and other practical kits for their children.
5. Motivating biology teachers through award of prizes and according them recognition through letters of commendation.

The involvement of the PTA can occur through various means which include membership on advisory committees and organizations, participation in specific problem – solving and programme design tasks on classroom presentation and focus groups depending on the needs and strengths of individual schools and communities, ( Epstein & Sander, 2002)

Positive behaviour offers schools a structured approach to address children's behaviour from the individual level to the school wide level. Professionals are encouraged to include all relevant stakeholders especially families in actively planning, implementing and evaluating supports provided (Minke & Anderson, 2005)

Family – school collaboration is a co-operative process of planning that brings together school staff-parents', children and community members to maximize resources for child achievement and development. Increased parents involvement can result in home environments that are more conducive to learning, improving in communication and consistency between home and school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997, Williamson 1997).

Haynes & Comer (1996), Lloyd (1996) & Williamson (1997) identified six ways that schools can promote parent involvement in learning as follows: parenting, teaching at home, parent – teachers’ conferences, organizing school activities, decision making and providing parents’ information on community resources. Science and technology, the bedrock of meaningful development of which biology is an integral part cannot function effectively and achieve its optimal goals, if parents and teachers work in isolation. Hence there is the need for school personnel to work in collaboration with the host community towards fostering continuous school improvement and by extension to enhance students’ outcome.

### **The tradition of Parental Involvement**

Involving parents in their children’s education in decision making is a relatively new activity in many countries like United States (Barquet, 1990 and Sosa, 1997). In an effort to involve parents in education, the school see parents as agents of service for the school rather than as equal partners in the educational endeavour. Schools determine the areas for assistance and how parents would assist, (Bermudez, 1994). Ascher (1987) defines parental involvement as a range of activities from promoting the value of education in the home to the actual role of team decision – makers in policy, curriculum and instructional issues. According to Ascher (1987), parents can participate at various levels including taking advocacy roles such as sitting on councils and committees; participating in the decision and operation of schools. Parents can serve as classroom aides, accompany a class on a field trip or assist teachers in a variety of other ways. More recently, parent’s involvement include parents initiating learning activities at home to improve their children’s performance in school. For example, reading to them, helping them with home work, playing educational games, or discussing current events. Clearly, parents involvement is seen as greater than parents participating in ‘bale sale’.

Traditionally, parent’s involvement roles have been limited to activities such as Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and parents – teachers’ conferences. More recently, the goals 2000: Educate America Acts of 1994 has called for more challenging academic standards as well as an increase in parent participation and establishment of parent involvement programs in schools. Despite the establishment of PTA, most parent involvement in PTA programmes is still in the preliminary stages of development. (Acsher, 1987).

### **THE RATIONALE**

The important forms of professional learning and problems solving occur in group settings within schools and school districts. Organized groups provide the social interactions that often deepens learning and the interpersonal support and synergy necessary for creativity solving the complex problems of teaching and learning. Since many of the recommendations contained in these standards advocate for increased teamwork among teachers, administrators and parents in designing lessons, critiquing student work and analyzing various types of data, among other tasks, it is imperative that professional learning be directed at improving the quality of collaborative work. (Lewandowski and Moller, 1997 and Jackson & Davis 2000)

Some biology concepts like reproduction and genetics have been criticised by religious sects in the society on ‘‘why the child should be exposed to the sacred things of nature’’. Such issue should be explained at a collaborative meeting between parents and teachers to eliminate the erroneous impression. Biology education is concerned with the study of living things; as such no information about the life processes should be concealed. The knowledge of biology has nothing to do with doctrines of the church.

One of the most difficult tasks of Parents Teachers Association (PTA) is constructively managing the conflicts that inevitably arise when participants discuss their fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning and seek the best ways to improve student achievement. Some schools have managed conflicts by steering away from controversial issues or pretending that significant disagreements do not exist. Such pseudo-community is a barrier that inhibits educators from speaking honestly with one another about their views on important issues, which is a critical step in conflict resolution. These candid conversations are essential in reaching consensus on long term goals and strategies and in finding solutions to the perennial problems of teaching and school leadership; (Barth, 2001, Dufour & Eaker 1998).

According to Meeks (2001) with an emphasis on parental involvement in children’s education both at home and school, family basics strives to strengthen families by offering skill-building opportunities, family and community supports thereby reducing the risks of development and educational handicaps in their young children. Family basics; a project of Women’s Opportunity and Resource Development Incorporated is a partnership with Missonla County Public School Title/Program. It includes nine unique family resource centres in neighbourhood schools and community to promote parental involvement in education, family

literacy and the development of informal support networks for isolated families.

From the foregoing evidences, it is clear that for any nation to sustain its development process and take full advantage of its resources;

- a. It must possess adequate biological knowledge and
- b. Be able to translate such scientific knowledge into technological capability.

### **The role of Parents in Sustaining the Educational System**

Education implies acculturation and transmission of what is worthwhile, activation of learner potentials for the benefit of the society and learner; and leading the learner to acquire desirable knowledge skill and disposition (Nwoke 2008).

Science education is the cornerstone for any sustainable technological development programme. Biology education finds application in nutrition, Dentistry, Horticulture, Medicine, Food science and technology, Biotechnology among others. (Sarojini, 2005)

The need for well trained and balanced scientists for national development and economic growth cannot therefore be overemphasized. A wealth of research supports the effectiveness of youth, parents, family and community involvement in improving both students' achievement and programme quality (Ryan, Staler and Lynch, 2004). More recent research such as the impact of PTA in school programmes supports the importance of parent's involvement, particularly in shaping children health-related behaviour (Welk, 1999, Blake 2001)

Parents – Teachers Association in recent times have taken the bull by the horn in providing basic amenities and infrastructure in the proper management and implementation of school curriculum, such is evident in schools like Madonna group of schools in Owerri, where Parent-Teachers Association have built and equipped a science laboratory and handed it over to the school authority for proper management.

Parents/Teachers Association also organizes workshops on science exhibitions which has showcased their manipulative skills and is evident in their academic achievement in science subjects like biology. Regular meetings of PTA of various schools take into consideration the welfare of the students and as such provide the schools with some of the equipment and instructional materials like microscopes, slides, visual aids, computers, autoclave, thermometer, flip charts, textbooks, etc that enhances effective teaching and learning. In many parts of Nigeria, PTA builds classrooms and hand them over to the school authority

to create conducive learning environment. Parents – Teachers Association of many schools go as far as providing incentives for outstanding teachers thereby promoting excellence par service and the outcome is improvement in educational achievements which has produced students that can compete favourably in every sphere of life.

The provision of educational materials like science equipments makes teaching and learning of subjects like biology concrete and precise because it is a subject in which the theory is taught along side its practical (Ndiho, 2007). Biology, which is the study of life is an integral part of many discipline such as medicine, pharmacy, microbiology, biochemistry, laboratory technology excreta, cannot be taught effectively without the basic and fundamental materials in place hence the involvement of parents in school administration uplifts the achievements of educational objectives especially biology education (Guzman, 1990, Delgado - Gautan, 1991, Commins, 1992 and Mapp, 2002).

Parent/teachers Association have gone a long in inculcating discipline and participating actively in implementation of school curriculum and decision making; this is evident in the majority of the products of our secondary schools, who are individuals with the right motivation and orientation for transformation into a self – sufficient, fully industrialized and economic viable nation.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) have succeeded in creating awareness, helped in preparation of funding bid for development and maintenance with increased profile and functionality. PTA also helps in preliminary development of a web-based portal-bringing together in one place materials and links with a focus on users and career development in professional education in health and social care. Hence all hands must be on deck and no stone could be left unturned in ensuring that a solid foundation is laid in science through parents – teachers association.

### **Suggestions**

The following suggestions may be helpful in the involvement of parents and Teachers in administration of the school:

1. Parents should be motivated to attend PTA meeting by involving them in some committees in the school.

2. Information about the progress of the child in school should be regularly supplied to the parents preferably on termly basis.
3. Parents Teachers Association conferences should be organised at regular interval, so that resource persons can educate the participants on the roles of PTA and its demand on parents, teachers and school administrators.
4. All decisions involving the child should be jointly taken by the school administration in conjunction with parents and teachers.

Corresponding Email Address: [rosykachi@yahoo.com](mailto:rosykachi@yahoo.com)

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