

The Subjective Experience and Interpretation of Middle School Parents Participating In 'Parent-Teacher Conferences' Regarding Their Children's Issues at School: A Qualitative Study

Yeung Wing Tung

Master of Arts Programme in Family Counselling and Family Education,
Department of Social Work, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Parental involvement in schools has gradually gained importance since education reform in Hong Kong. Previous research has examined the benefits and drawbacks of parents' engagement in their children's education from a child-centered perspective or has focused on parental participation initiated by institutions when evaluating the change in home-school power dynamics. However, the roles of parents as guardians and educators remain unclear. While schools have employed parent-teacher conferences as an intervention to identify and define students' problems, the process potentially involves societal expectations of parental roles and stereotypes of family participation in children's schooling. This study employed a qualitative design to explore parents' views on participating in parent-teacher conferences. In total, five middle school parents were interviewed, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews. Three overarching themes were synthesized: parents may be misunderstood during meetings and experience negative emotions; the phenomenon of parent-blaming still appears to be prevalent. Moreover, parent-teacher conferences reveal the existence of two different educational discourses between teachers and parents, and parents may experience tensions and conflicts between their values during conferences. The findings show that parental involvement in schooling is challenging yet important. Although parental discourse power in school education has gradually increased, the important factor in achieving empowerment is still closely related to the educational level of parents. Understanding parents' perspectives and interpretations of their experiences and interactions with schools sheds light on the multifaceted views of education and delineates the influence of dominant discourses on parental education roles.

Keywords: parent-teacher conference, parent-blaming, parental involvement, family education, social educational discourse