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Teacher Talk in collaboration with OECD

“Parents as Partners in Teaching?”

Saturday October 7th, 2017

- **Anika Mir**, Teacher, Oaktree Primary School, UAE
- **Fidaq Zaatar**, Teacher, Palestine
- **Yordan Hodzhev**, Teacher, Georgi Benkovski Primary School, Bulgaria

Moderated by: Elizabeth Fordham, Senior Advisor Global Relations and Deputy Head of Policy Advice and Implementation Division, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD

Evidence shows that parental involvement in a child’s education has a positive influence on academic outcomes and well-being. And educators know that engaging parents in the life of the school is essential to good outcomes. “A survey in the US of teachers found that engaging parents was their biggest challenge,” said Fordham. “Too often we only engage with parents when there is a problem we are reactive rather than proactive.”

The problem is that many parents don’t even know how to engage and teachers don’t know how to engage them, said Fordham. And in a poll taken during the session, 48% of respondents said they felt parents were not very engaged in school decision-making.

So how can teachers engage parents as partners in education? Teachers can use technology as a powerful ally in achieving this goal, they can encourage parents to volunteer, require them to participate in homework and just generally model a positive attitude, said Fordam, who admitted to finding it difficult to engage with her own children’s school despite being an educator.

In Palestine, where Zaatar works with children whose parents have high levels of illiteracy, she started a closed Facebook page where parents can talk to her about their children’s progress. In Dubai Mir uses Class Dojo, an interactive website where she can send out pictures of class activity and give parents alerts about what is happening with their children throughout their day. They can also earn online rewards. “For good behavior, listening on task, parents get a letter on their mobile, and can see what they were awarded for, so that parent already has a really good idea of how their child has done that day,” she said. “If there is something negative, the parents are also alerted straight away, they know their child is going to come home in a grump, so they know what to ask.”





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However, it's important to set boundaries in communications with overzealous parents, so they don't expect email replies during teaching time, said Mir. Her school requires acknowledgement of receipt of communication within 24 hours, and a response within 48.

Zaatar got parents of her students involved in teaching the importance of breakfast by getting them to send meals to school and making an event of the daily meal. "We played music, they're eating while they are enjoying, they're eating not just to eat, so step by step the child is more encouraged to eat their breakfast," she said. "Soon the parents, they're not just sending a sandwich, they are sending fruits, they're sending healthy meals instead of useless foods."

Hodzhev found he got engagement from parents when he made it his mission while teaching an exceedingly difficult class in Bulgaria. "I decided to go for a personal relationship with every single person from the community," he said. "It turned out there were a few parents that responded. We started to see them regularly. I started to inform them of the progress of their children. This was the beginning of finding the solution."

Simply asking parents to come and see what their children are up to also works, said Hodzhev, who did just that when he encouraged girls in his class who were dreaming of becoming hairdressers and models to learn how to use drills and screwdrivers to repair broken items.

The hope is that in certain societies, children of today will then pass on their experiences at engagement to the next generation, the panelists said.

"Society is becoming more enlightened and women are tending to encourage their daughters," said Zaatar. "Then when she will become a mother she will become better at helping kids through her knowledge."

Main Takeaway: A free Facebook-style programme such as Classroom Dojo is one of the best ways to get parents involved in aspects of their child's school day they would otherwise not be able to access.

