

# EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INDIAN PARENTS AS WRITING PARTNERS: AN INSPIRATION FROM CANADIAN MIDDLE GRADE CLASSROOMS

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing plays a pivotal role in acquisition of language skills. Its takes prominence when it comes to writing in English language which is extensively used for global mediation of knowledge (Mahboob, 2014; Mansoor, 2005; Marlina & Giri, 2014; Rahman, 2002). Hyland (2003) believes that performance in language development is subject to improvement in writing skills. A text of an effective ESL writer must be cohesive, logical, clearly structured, interesting and properly organized with a wide range of vocabulary and mastery of conventions in mechanics (Jacobs & L, 1981; Hall, 1988). However, writing is usually relegated to teaching and learning of grammar and syntax which consequently undermines its emphasis and development. Henceforth, the growth of the most difficult skill calls for attention from the early phase of language education. In Canada, the National Middle School Association, 2010 puts forth two cornerstones of 16 features, which focuses on (1) active involvement of families in the education of their children (2) involvement of community and business partner. This emphasizes that a larger community involvement outside the classroom provides students a genuine audience and gives purpose to their writing. Consequently students recognize the importance of writing in the 'real world' which is the problem faced by many teachers of writing. That unless students feel it is relevant to the real world; they might not put in many efforts in writing and re-writing the sample. *"Literacy must be regarded as social practice and attend to the multidimensionality of literate communities and affinity groups"* (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1993) (Gee, 2000) Though it is a general agreement, the problem is to define, develop clear understanding and expectations. (Beck, 2002; Brashers, 2008; Compton-Lilly, 2009; Ferrara, 2009) The present research paper delves into the importance of uses of community resources for teaching writing in Indian classroom context, with regards to its prevalence in Canada.

## TWO FOCAL QUESTIONS

Nunan (1989) Writing is immensely difficult cognitive activity which demands the learner to have command over many factors. These factors range from academic to personal background of the learner to various psychological, linguistic and cognitive phenomena. (Dar & Khan, 2015; Haider, 2012) When so many areas affect a learners' writing, it is quite imperative to foster their interest, motivation and enjoyment of writing from all quarters of life. However there is less research which contributes to the uses of community resources for teaching writing.

In Canada the research is based on **two focal questions** relevant to parental and community involvement. i.e. (1) In what ways does the support of parents influence your teaching of writing? The responses to this question included 75% teachers attempt parents' involvement in teaching writing. (2) Are there community resources and practices regarding writing that you use in your teaching of writing? The responses to this question found 54% teachers uses community resources to teach writing. However there are number of challenges the teacher of writing face while involving parents to support their students' writing ability.

Here the support provided by parents is broadly categorized as (1) General Support and (2) Specific Support. **General Support** includes motivation, appreciation, assigning homework, checking agendas for students by the parents. One of the most significant lessons a parent can instill in child is to make him/her believe that education is the key to improve one's economic status then students get motivated enough by parents. **Specific Support** includes parents' involvement specific to writing programs. Parents help them see the value of writing in their lives through reading and editing rough drafts with their children and responding to the ideas of writing. Parents must encourage them to write thank you notes, family emails etc.

Ways in which teachers involved parents into their kids' writing was assignment like snippets on popular TV shows and experiential paragraph writing for homework. Teachers keep in contact with parents via mail once

a week, in the first week students are given reading material as a framework to write about, in the second week a friend's response on their writing is shown, and in the third week parents' response is shown to them. This way student got immediate feedback on their writing. Many international students, despite being proficient speakers of English language to carry out their normal life, lack at their writing ability that is because writing is not speaking, while writing an essay the writer does not get a chance to read the other person's body language or expressions the way they would if they were speaking to someone. The importance of immediate feedback in language acquisition cannot be ruled out. In speaking, one receives immediate feedback that allows quick corrections as one speaks the same does not hold true for writing. Therefore teachers must employ strategies to elicit ideas from students

to be penned down on a piece of paper to promote their verbal ability. Moreover, instant and critical feedback needs to be given on their output, so that their confidence is elevated (**Haider, 2012**).

### PROBLEMS WITH THE SUPPORT

The research in Canada found 66% teachers complain about ambivalence in parents involvement in writing programs which varies each year from class to class. The following problems were experienced by teachers of writing with parents' involvement (**Edmondson,1999; Foley Cussumano,2008**)

- Lack of Education
- Lack of English Language Fluency & Feedback
- Criticism about Mechanics of Writing than Ideas
- Parents doing the whole of writing assignment
- Negating Teachers' Effort
- Not allowing to take Ownership of Writing
- Mismatch between Teachers & Parents' Perspectives

### SOLUTION

Most parents are willing to assist their children in becoming good writers however they are clueless about how to assist. Therefore, teachers can make parents into valuable writing partners through a tool kit of guidelines for coaching writers. Mary Ehrenworth, deputy director of the Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University's Teachers College, describes practical ways parents can support their children by helping them rehearse their writing and giving them knowledgeable feedback. **Peter Johnstons** argues that the choice of words to build up a child's sense of being an independent problem solver works as a teacher but not as parent. Parent must be explained the vision you have for students as writers because writers from all ages benefit from having a writing partner. So, if parents are involved, they can help them rehearse their writing, they can give feedback, they can be the first reader of their child. To achieve this goal, primarily parents must be given a tool-kit of high leverage which means practical tips for coaching writers. These practical tips work at three levels – (1) Help Rehearse Structure (2) Aid Elaboration (3) Work with Checklists & Exemplars

**Help Rehearse Structure:** After being the first reader of their children's writing, parents at the beginners' level help them rehearse their structure because most students face this challenge at the start of the process of writing. This rehearsing the text can be aided through following prompts:

- How will your story/article/essay go?
- If Story- Tell me Start: Middle: End
- If Argument – Tell me Claim: Reason: Evidence
- If Information – Tell me Topic: Sub Topics: Text Features
- Can you tell me about the parts?
- What do you want your reader to know right away?
- What are you saving for the end?

Feedback can include actually telling which part goes where for him/her to figure out where the heart of the story lives. Feedback on where introduction/conclusion will give away insight and which evidence will support central argument.

**Aid Elaboration:** This calls for patience on parents' part because it deals with efforts to capture their thinking. The following ways can aid elaboration:

- Jot down ideas when they are sharing/talking to you
- Recall what s/he said to you about the topic
- Attention to their Plan of writing
- Comments like: "Don't you want to include this cool thing you said?"

**Work with Checklists & Exemplars:** This is to "move them beyond compliance" (**Paul Tough, 2003**) when most writing tasks are operating in void there is zero relevance because of the absence of clarity of the desired goal. Therefore the use of checklist and exemplars that is strong examples of a particular type of writing must

be asked from teachers. This results in better articulation and taking the ownership of their own assessment. The only way to accelerate achievement is learners to have crystal clear vision of what they are trying to achieve. **John Hattie (2008)** At tertiary level of asking by parents for the checklist, listing the features of writing specific to genres if writing portfolios are carefully considered by teachers, it can be used to capitalized on parental responses too.

Another significant step towards expanding students' readership is making use of **Community Resources** through the following:

- Author Visits – Workshop or Conference
- Writing Contests by Local book stores
- Submissions for Local Newsletter or Newspaper

**Pedro Noguera (2003)** *"when peer and academic cultures divide, peer culture always wins out."* This proves that when a larger community is involved, it generates active interest and excitement in young writers. They see the possibility of their writing being open to scrutiny or publication thereby finding a wide readership not limiting only to teacher & parent.

## CONCLUSION

Though teaching of writing is a problem in USA, Canada & Indian classrooms and budget is always on decline for such enrichment activities, all stakeholders must heed to the potential of parental participation and attention from the outside world which contributes to the sense of pride and willingness to work in students. Therefore teachers' ability to create a story, engaging literary curricula can be enhanced by service to teachers in assisting them to involve parents and larger community. Such positive literary connections are vital to the success of developing writers.

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