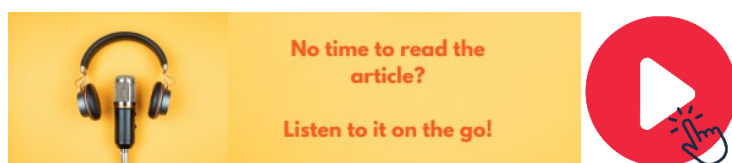


## Student-Teacher-Parent-Community – building strong foundations for academic success together

~ Safa Razak



Is this true about children's education? Is it important that parents and society play a role in the education of the child, or does school bear the sole responsibility?



There has been a lot of debate on the question of parent involvement in education. While the teaching community – teachers, school administrators, tutors, and curriculum planners play a crucial role in shaping the educational journey of students, the role of parents and community cannot be ignored. For years, research has been conducted on the impact of parental support in the learning process. Many countries have incorporated the findings of these research to create a safe, nurturing and inclusive learning environment for students, with the help of their parents and communities. Let us take a deeper look at how engagement of the family affects education, and what its implications are at different stages of a student's life.

### The importance of parent and community involvement

Ongoing research points towards improved academic outcomes among children when parents, teachers and the community work in tandem. In India, the question of how parents and community can become an integral part of children's education has been a point of contention for many years. With the COVID lockdown, the perspective that it is the sole responsibility of schools to educate the child has changed considerably. In quite a few interactions that were held for the purpose of this article\*, many teachers and parents concurred that parental involvement in education has shown a vast improvement in students' academic performance.



Similarly, the community plays a major role in everyday learning. The use of community resources helps in enhancing educational opportunities and encouraging a growth mindset among learners. A study undertaken by Utrecht University (Hogenhout, 2018)<sup>1</sup>, showed that community-based activities, especially in economically backward communities, encouraged students to participate more in activities outside the classroom, facilitating inquiry-based learning.

The holistic approach when education extends beyond the classrooms is instrumental in the overall development of students. Here are some of the benefits of this approach.

**a. Improved academic performance**

Dr Joyce Epstein, Co-Director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University, along with a team of scholars, observed that students whose parents were involved in their education through reading, helping with homework and even discussing school events achieved better grades and performed better at school than those who received little or no support at home<sup>2</sup>.



Many teachers are of the opinion that students whose parents regularly attend school events such as parent-teacher meetings, 'open' classrooms or volunteer at school are motivated to work harder towards achieving the goals they set for themselves. In addition to this, schools observed that students whose parents

<sup>1</sup> Parental Involvement in Indian Education, Hogenhout, 2018

\* The interactions were held by the author independently for purposes of this article.

<sup>2</sup> 25 years of School and Family Connections, Andrew Myers, 2021

<https://hub.jhu.edu/2021/11/16/building-school-and-family-connections/>

are actively involved in the Early Years' period have better reading and cognitive skills.

Using a Learning Management System (LMS), where parents and teachers can interact, helps parents to stay up to date on lessons taught at school while teachers can remain apprised of what the students have learned at home. The implementation of this has been welcomed by parents and it has led to students being better prepared for class tests and assessments.

**b. Better school atmosphere**

When parents and community members are actively engaged in school activities, there is a positive message – that education is valuable and prioritized. In Early Years' Education, this becomes an integral part of creating an inclusive environment as well. For example, many schools have a programme where parents visit the school to talk about their jobs. Children learn more about the job as well as understand that every profession lends to the wellbeing of society, leading to dignity of labour.

With more parents being involved in school activities, there are fewer instances of bullying as well. A school in Ernakulam, India, resolved an issue of online bullying by inviting parents to hold discussions at home and at school about the same. With increased parental monitoring, the incidents of bullying came down drastically in a few days and stopped completely within a month.

**c. Enhanced sense of ownership/belonging**

Involving parents and communities in education fosters a sense of ownership in the academic process. When everyone becomes a stakeholder in the success of the school, there is more participation, and students and parents are more invested in the learning process. There is a sense of belonging among students, resulting in better productivity and less cases of vandalism.

**d. Better social interaction**

Parent and community involvement helps in developing students' behaviour and social skills. Extra-curricular activities, fairs and other opportunities for social interaction help to foster a sense of community. They also help children to interact with peers and elders.

**Ways to involve parents and community**

For a long time, parent involvement has been limited to parent-teacher meetings and the setting up of a Parent-Teacher Association. While this helps with discussing student progress, there are myriad ways in which parents can be more involved in school activities.

**a. Volunteering**

Parents and community members can volunteer their time and expertise to tutor or mentor students. Parents can also volunteer to conduct study sessions at

home for a group of students to encourage collaborative learning. Organizing extracurricular activities in community halls is another way in which parents and the community can volunteer. Parents can also volunteer to set up science or art fairs, preparatory drills before competitive exams and exhibitions.

### **b. Community partnerships**

Field trips, short learning trips to supermarkets, hospitals and other establishments and career counselling help students learn more about their community. Schools can partner with local businesses to facilitate hands-on learning and organize after-school programs and internships.

### **c. Contributing learning materials**

Today, learning is not restricted to textbooks alone. There are many resources for learning, but not all students have access to these. Parents and the community can contribute learning materials by setting up community libraries or even topic-specific videos that would educate students. Sharing worksheets, notes, reading cards or stationery, especially with schools with limited resources helps to provide more opportunities for learning. For instance, during the COVID lockdown, some parents volunteered to send voice notes via messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, to help students understand the grammar while learning languages such as Hindi and Tamil (the language that students had chosen as their ‘second language’ in schools).



### **d. Summer learning activities**

When schools and governments are talking about an increased focus on skills-based learning, the summer months can be more productive with parent involvement. Schools and the parent community can collaborate to create summer learning ‘packets’ or activities that would help students to prepare for the next academic year. Picnics, day trips to places of scientific or historic importance, could also contribute to learning in a fun way.

## **Challenges in parent and community involvement**

A survey conducted among teachers and parents regarding a collaborative educational approach showed that the most pertinent question among both communities was – how can *all* parents and teachers work together to achieve the academic goals they set for learners? Including everyone presents challenges on many fronts – differences of opinion, language barriers, time constraints, and so on.



Many private and public schools have students from all walks of life. In many countries, a floating population results in multi-lingual communities. In such cases, parent involvement may be limited owing to various factors including the primary language that teachers or school administrators use during meetings. Many schools in India face this problem. Parents have found a way around it by forming Whatsapp groups to discuss meetings or to plan extra-curricular activities, after the official school meetings.

Finding time to be an active part of the activities at school or home is another problem that many parents face. Single-parent households and families with multiple children face this, but schools have come forward to help. Schools suggest that these parents volunteer their time during weekends for extra-curricular activities or for group-study sessions.

The solution that teachers and parents have arrived at is turn-taking. Everyone acknowledges that it is not possible to participate in every school activity, or be present all the time. Therefore, it is best to use an interactive calendar where parents can enter the dates or days they are available on, and the school can schedule activities based on parent interest and availability. In this way, there is transparency and a chance to volunteer for at least one school event. Despite the issues, parents and schools are finding ways to get involved and move forward towards a more inclusive learning space.



*Safa Razak is a CELTA qualified teacher with over a decade of experience in ESL teaching. She is an author and a resource person for several leading publications.*



What are your thoughts vis-à-vis the author's views? Tell us about some of the roadblocks you face while trying to bring together student-parent-community by writing to us at [OTTIndia@oup.com](mailto:OTTIndia@oup.com).

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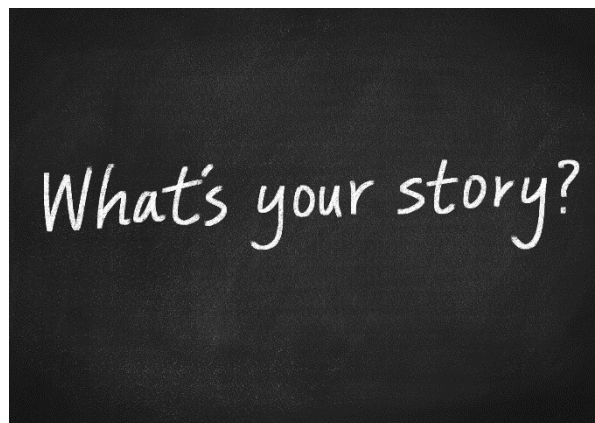


## Lesson Plan: 5 ideas to include parents in education

~ Safa Razak

Here are some ideas to plan lessons that will include parents. These are not specific to any grade or subject and can be altered according to the theme or topic being taught in school. These ideas can be incorporated into any lesson plan.

1. **Creating illustrated storybooks:** Children love stories. Illustrated books have always been a favourite among students, teachers and parents. To facilitate learning, students can create stories based on what they have learned at school. They can do this at home, with the help of their parents. The idea behind creating story books is that the cover page could have the name of the author and the illustrator. So, the students could be encouraged to write the story, while their parents illustrate, or they could be co-authors. Another advantage is that parents are aware of what has been taught at school and can help their children to use their own words to explain their learning while making it interesting. Parents can guide children to be conscious of using AI-generated content while creating the storybooks.



2. **Field trips:** Schools organize field trips every year. There is a great way for parents to be involved in their children's education. One of the ways to plan trips to include parents is to create a field trip calendar at the beginning of the year, and invite parents to provide the dates that they can join the trips. Additionally, parents can suggest places students can visit or even offer to host a field trip. For example, a parent who does bio-composting and has an organic garden can organize a field trip to the garden, so children learn about composting, waste management and gardening.



3. **Organising fairs or extracurricular activities:** Schools are usually hard-pressed for time with the curriculum and other academic activities. Parents can volunteer their time to organize book fairs, jumble sales to sponsor a student or contribute to the infrastructure of the school, science fairs, and so on. They can also volunteer to judge contests or sports events. Some parents, interested in sports, can serve as coaches for school teams.

4. **Create content for learning:** There is no dearth of resources available for teaching or learning today. However, to find appropriate teaching material that is user-friendly and learner-specific is a task. Teachers use many online games to further the learning process, with the use of websites like Kahoot and WordWall. Parents can help create online learning content in the form of videos, games or tests for students, especially before the exams., with least support from AI tools, and even if it is used, content should be verified and edited before sharing with children.
5. **Host study groups:** Study groups or homework groups are a great way for parents to help students to prepare for school and examinations. Stay-at-home parents are usually the ones who volunteer the most for these activities, but the school could encourage more parents to be involved in these groups, as they can keep an eye on what their child is doing, while also imparting knowledge to everyone in the group.



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# Sodality



**Pronunciation:** /səʊˈdælɪti/

**Meaning:**

Fellowship or comradeship

An association or society

A confraternity or association, especially a Roman Catholic religious guild or brotherhood – a lay<sup>1</sup> society for religious and charitable purposes.

**Origin and additional information:** Origin can be traced back to early 17<sup>th</sup> century from French ‘sodalité’ or Latin ‘sodalitas’, drawing its meaning from ‘sodalis’ (comrade/companion). A sodality is a noun that stands for an organization of companions or friends/organized society or fellowship. For example, a group of firefighters may be considered a modern example of sodality.

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<sup>1</sup> What is a lay society?

Members of a religious group who have been baptized but are not part of the clergy are known as lay people, or the laity. Members who minister, are therefore called lay ministers. (Source: <https://onlinedegrees.sandiego.edu/what-is-lay-ministry>)



## Use over time for: sodality



The term was used already in early Christian times for voluntary groups of the faithful who sought to work together with like-minded people for the strengthening of their own religious commitment and advancing the Kingdom of Christ to others.<sup>2</sup>

### Usage:

1. *John Aubrey (writing in 1659) says: "We now use the word clubbe for a sodality in a tavern."*

(Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, Volume 6, Slice 5 | Various)

2. *There were also military sodalities of musketeers, cross-bowmen, archers, swordsmen in every town.*

(Source: The Rise of the Dutch Republic, Volume 1, 1556 by John Lothrop Motley)

3. *It was a tragic loss of life that was felt throughout the sodality of firefighters.*

(Source: Anonymous)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=36536>