

THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY JOURNAL

Fall/Winter 2008

Volume 18, Number 2

Academic Development Institute

The School Community Journal

Fall/Winter 2008
Volume 18, Number 2

Sam Redding, *Executive Editor*
Lori G. Thomas, *Editor*

The School Community Journal Advisory Board

Paul J. Baker
Illinois State University
Normal, Illinois

Alison A. Carr-Chellman
Penn State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

James P. Comer
Yale Child Study Center
New Haven, Connecticut

Diane D'Angelo
RMC Research Corporation
Washington, D.C.

Rolande Deslandes
Universite du Quebec a Trois-Rivieres
Quebec, Canada

Patricia Edwards
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Joyce Epstein
Center on School, Family &
Community Partnerships
Baltimore, Maryland

Patricia Gándara
University of California
Davis, California

Thomas E. Glass
University of Memphis
Memphis, Tennessee

Anne T. Henderson
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Washington, D.C.

Esther Sui-chu Ho
The Chinese Univeristy of Hong Kong
Hong Kong SAR, China

Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey
Peabody College at Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

William H. Jeynes
California State University, Long Beach
Long Beach, California

Raquel-Amaya Martínez González
Universidad de Oviedo
Oviedo, Spain

Hazel Loucks
National Education Association
Edwardsville, Illinois

Karen L. Mapp
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Denise Maybank
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Toni Moynihan-McCoy
Corpus Christi Independent School District
Corpus Christi, Texas

Dorothy Rich
The Home and School Institute
Washington, D.C.

Janice M. Rosales
Chicago Public Schools
Chicago, Illinois

Diane Scott-Jones
Boston College (retired)
Boston, Massachusetts

Herbert J. Walberg
Hoover Institution at Stanford University
Chicago, Illinois

Heather Weiss
Harvard Family Research Project
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Roger Weissberg
University of Illinois at Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY JOURNAL

Fall/Winter 2008

Volume 18, Number 2

Academic Development Institute

ISSN 1059-308X

© 2008 The Academic Development Institute

Business and Editorial Office

The School Community Journal

121 N. Kickapoo Street

Lincoln, IL 62656 USA

Phone: 217-732-6462

Fax: 217-732-3696

E-mail: editor@adi.org

Requests for Manuscripts

The School Community Journal publishes a mix of:

(1) research (original, review, and interpretation), (2) essay and discussion, (3) reports from the field, including descriptions of programs, and (4) book reviews.

The journal seeks manuscripts from scholars, administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and others interested in the school as a community.

Editorial Policy and Procedure

The School Community Journal is committed to scholarly inquiry, discussion, and reportage of topics related to the community of the school. Manuscripts are considered in four categories:

- (1) research (original, review, and interpretation),
- (2) essay and discussion,
- (3) reports from the field, including descriptions of programs, and
- (4) book reviews.

The journal follows the format suggested in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition*.

Contributors should send, via e-mail attachments of electronic files (in Word if possible): the manuscript; an abstract of no more than 250 words; a one paragraph description (each) of the author(s); and a mailing address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address where the author(s) can be reached to:

editor@adi.org

The cover letter should state that the work is not under simultaneous consideration by other publication sources. A hard copy of the manuscript is not necessary unless specifically requested by the editor.

As a refereed journal, all submissions undergo a blind peer review as part of the selection process. Therefore, please include the author's description and other identifying information in a separate electronic file.

Subscription to *The School Community Journal*

The School Community Journal is published twice annually – Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer. *The School Community Journal* is now a free, open access, online-only publication. Therefore, we are no longer accepting subscriptions.

The archives to the journal may be accessed at <http://www.adi.org/journal>

Contents

Adolescents' Experience Doing Homework: Associations Among Context, Quality of Experience, and Outcomes	9
<i>Lee Shumow, Jennifer A. Schmidt, and Hayal Kackar</i>	
Race and Class Challenges in Community Collaboration for Educational Change	29
<i>Linwood H. Cousins, Roslyn A. Mickelson, Brian Williams, and Anne Velasco</i>	
Facilitating Family Involvement and Support for Inclusive Education	53
<i>Yaoying Xu and John Filler</i>	
Expectations of Chinese Families of Children with Disabilities Towards American Schools	73
<i>Lusa Lo</i>	
From Mao to Memphis: Chinese Immigrant Fathers' Involvement with Their Children's Education	91
<i>Alan Klein</i>	
Family-School Relations as Social Capital: Chinese Parents in the United States	119
<i>Dan Wang</i>	
Low-Income, Urban Consumers' Perceptions of Community School Outreach Practices, Desired Services, and Outcomes	147
<i>Julie O'Donnell, Sandra L. Kirkner, and Nancy Meyer-Adams</i>	
A Review of "Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships"	165
<i>Jeffrey A. Anderson and Allison Howland</i>	

Editorial Review Board

Jeffrey A. Anderson
Indiana Univ. Purdue Univ. Indianapolis

Ji-Hi Bae
Sungshin Women's University, Seoul, Korea

Brian R. Beabout
The University of New Orleans, Louisiana

Alison Carr-Chellman
Penn State University, University Park

Susan DeMoss
School Administrator, Oklahoma City

Germaine Edwards
Center on Innovation & Improvement,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Karen Estep
Lincoln Christian College, Lincoln, Illinois

Karen Gerdtz
Consultant, Salem, New Hampshire

Karen Guskin
Parents as Teachers National Center, St. Louis

Diana Hiatt-Micheal
Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA

Pat Hulsebosch
Gallaudet University, Washington, DC

Frances Kochan
Auburn University, Alabama

Jean Konzal
Professor Emerita, The College of New Jersey

Revathy Kumar
University of Toledo, Ohio

Diane Kyle
University of Louisville, Kentucky

Robert Leier
ESL Coordinator, Auburn University, AL

Vera Lopez
Arizona State University, Tempe

Pamela Loughner
Consultant, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Kate McGilly
Parents as Teachers National Center, St. Louis

Oliver Moles
Social Science Research Group, LLC,
Rockville, Maryland

Marilyn Murphy
Center on Innovation & Improvement,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Alberto M. Ochoa
San Diego State University, California

Reatha Owen
Academic Development, Lincoln, IL

Eva Patrikakou
DePaul University, Chicago

Reyes Quezada
University of San Diego, California

Timothy Quezada
El Paso Community College, Texas

A. Y. "Fred" Ramirez
California State University, Fullerton

Cynthia J. Reed
Truman Pierce Institute, Auburn, AL

Melissa Schulz
University of Cincinnati, OH

Steven B. Sheldon
Center on School, Family, & Community
Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University

Lee Shumow
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb

Martha Strickland
Penn State Capital College, Middletown, PA

Elise Trumbull
California State University, Northridge

Editor's Comments

The Fall/Winter 2008 issue begins with a look at teens' experience of homework by Shumow, Schmidt, and Kackar. Their use of the Experience Sampling Method was interesting in and of itself, not to mention what they learned about adolescents. One particularly intriguing finding was that, at least for this sample, homework was not a major battleground between teens and parents, contrary to popular press reports.

Next, Cousins and his colleagues give us an insider's look at the ups and downs involved in university-school-community partnership projects. Their frank look at the interplay of historical and political contexts with race and class challenges provide insights that may be of great benefit to those preparing to undertake action research projects or other types of collaboration.

The next four articles involve a happy coincidence. The first article of the four, while not specifically addressing immigrant issues, does utilize a case involving an Asian Buddhist immigrant family. The remaining three all examine issues related to Chinese immigrants in the United States. Each does so from a different and unique focus and approach. Taken together, these four articles provide a very useful picture that will greatly enhance the understanding of U.S. educators working with Asian immigrant families.

The article by Xu and Filler describes an approach for facilitating meaningful family involvement in inclusive education across various settings. While their primary focus is on early childhood education, it could easily be applied to inclusion at any level. Next, Lo interviews Chinese immigrant families of children with disabilities regarding their expectations of schools. She includes some very practical suggestions to facilitate better communication and partnership between diverse parents and their children's schools.

Klein provides an enlightening look at Chinese immigrant fathers and their involvement with their children's schooling in the U.S., situated within the Chinese historical context in which these fathers were raised. Wang then gives us a view of Chinese immigrant parents through the lens of social capital. She compares the parents' perceptions of school culture in China and the U.S. and how those perceptions may be affecting their involvement in their children's education.

The final article in this issue by O'Donnell, Kirkner, and Meyer-Adams describes parent consumers' views of services offered by a community school in an urban setting, with attention to how such schools can reach more families in the future. Lastly, we have a book review of *Beyond the Bake Sale*, in which reviewers Anderson and Howland praise this practical guide and recommend its use for both practicing and preservice teachers.

Lori Thomas
October 2008

Adolescents' Experience Doing Homework: Associations Among Context, Quality of Experience, and Outcomes

Lee Shumow, Jennifer A. Schmidt, and Hayal Kackar

Abstract

Extant data collected through the Experience Sampling Method – a signal contingent method for gathering data about students' immediate experiences – were analyzed to describe adolescents' subjective experiences doing homework. Analyses were conducted to explore variation in subjective experience in relation to the contexts in which homework was completed, and in relation to academic and social-emotional outcomes. Students' cognitive, affective, and motivational states showed significant variations depending on who they were with when they were doing homework, as well as whether homework was their primary or secondary activity. Variations in the quality of homework experience were, in turn, significantly associated with several outcomes, such as self-esteem, future expectations, and school grades. Findings are discussed in terms of contributions to the homework literature by addressing the much needed link between homework and students' cognitive, affective, and motivational states.

Key Words: homework, adolescents, motivation, subjective experience, Experience Sampling Method, students, middle school, high school, parents, peers, context, outcomes

Introduction

Past Studies of Homework

Although American adolescents do less homework than students in many other countries (Harmon et al., 1997), the majority of U.S. adolescents have some homework assigned each day (Snyder, 1998), and both educators and parents believe homework is beneficial to students' learning (Warton, 2001). Recent studies have documented the amount of time adolescents spend on homework (Loveless, 2003) and the relationship between academic achievement and homework time (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006); however, little is known about the contexts in which adolescents do their homework or about their subjective experience of homework. The present study describes these contexts among a middle class sample, investigates adolescents' cognitive, affective, and motivational states in the various contexts, and examines associations between adolescents' subjective experiences doing homework and their global academic and social-emotional functioning.

Homework consists of tasks teachers intend students to complete outside of school even though students might actually do that work during school (Cooper, 1989). Teachers assign homework because they expect it to enhance learning and achievement, parental involvement, study skills, work habits, and motivational dispositions (Bempechat, 2004; Warton, 2001). Researchers have studied the academic effects of homework for some time. A recent meta-analysis (Cooper, Robinson, Patall, & Warton, 2006) found that the amount of time adolescents report doing homework on surveys is related to academic achievement, but the researchers noted that most claims about the relationship between homework and outcomes other than achievement have never been tested empirically, making this an important area for research. One study did find that more high school than middle school students reported their homework was boring and therefore tended not to complete it (Xu, 2004).

The student perspective has been missing from research on homework in particular (Warton, 2001) just as it has been from most other educational publications and policy discussions (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). The idea that educators must understand learner's perceptions and perspective about educational activities is central to contemporary constructivist theories (Daniels & Shumow, 2002). Leone and Richards (1989) conducted a study using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) to describe the thoughts, affect, and motivation of young adolescents while doing homework in different contexts, but that study is limited because the data were collected from a previous generation of students, and the sample was comprised only of middle school students. According to survey data, the amount of time high school students spend on

homework has declined (Loveless, 2003) since the time the Leone and Richards study was done, while the pressures for achievement have increased. The present study addresses the need for research linking homework with students' perspectives.

Homework and Motivation

Several theoretical models of achievement motivation frame our analyses (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Eccles, 1983). We examined adolescents' reports of affect, interest, enjoyment, effort, and control when doing homework in various contexts because the expectancy-value model of achievement motivation suggests that subjective experience is related to subjective task value and that students will be more likely to repeat or continue tasks that are emotionally rewarding, utilitarian, and "worth" the effort (Warton, 2001). We also consider the comparative perceptions of ability, control, and concentration that adolescents report while working on homework. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), intense concentration in activities that adolescents feel able to master is among the conditions that foster optimal learning and growth. He also emphasizes the importance of positive affective experience in human growth as well. When an individual experiences happiness or enjoyment while engaging in a given activity, he or she is more likely to seek opportunities to engage in that activity again, in an attempt to replicate the positive affective experience. In this manner, positive affect is a motivating factor, influencing one's choice of activity. As one continues to engage in an activity because it is both challenging and enjoyable, the skills that are relevant to that activity improve in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997). Thus, according to this model, if students feel happy when doing their homework, they would be more likely to continue to engage in homework, and learning would occur in the process.

Context of Homework Completion

One factor which might influence students' subjective states while doing homework is the context in which homework is completed. In this age of multitasking it is important to consider whether students view their homework as a primary activity. Do today's students tend to view homework as a "main activity" or as something they can get done while the bulk of their attention is focused on television, or friends, or some other activity? We examine how often homework is reported as a primary (compared to secondary) activity and then test whether adolescents' concentration, mood, and ratings of work habits vary when homework is the primary or secondary activity.

Companions During Homework

Some evidence suggests that adolescents' affect and motivation differs depending on who their companions are while they are doing homework. The

Leone and Richards (1989) study found that when adolescents were doing homework with peers they were happier than when alone or with parents. They were most attentive to their homework when with parents. In this study, we are especially interested in instances in which parents were reported to be helping with homework.

Little is known about parental involvement with adolescent homework; the few existing studies have depended on retrospective self-report data, usually from adolescents. Yet, literally thousands of articles and policy documents advise schools to involve parents as homework managers or helpers as a means of improving student achievement. Many believe that parental involvement in education is crucial to students' school success (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This "prevailing wisdom" about parental involvement with adolescent students and homework is belied by available evidence suggesting that adolescents whose parents help them with homework are actually less successful in school even when past achievement and numerous demographic variables are controlled (Shumow & Miller, 2001). Some have speculated that parents have difficulty helping adolescents because the material is more difficult in middle and high school than elementary school, and some limited evidence shows that parents help adolescents with homework primarily when the student is struggling academically. Anecdotal reports in the popular press conclude that "homework is a major battleground for many families" (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2001, p. 52; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Thus, we use ESM data to examine adolescents' quality of experience while doing homework with parents, and we compare these times to those when adolescents were doing homework alone or with their peers.

Associations Between Subjective Homework Experiences and Global Student Functioning

Given those expected variations, a critical question arises as to whether or not the immediate subjective experiences reported during homework are associated with longer term global student functioning. Our data do not allow us to determine the direction of these effects, but it is of interest to understand whether the transitory states are related to more global outcomes.

Quality of Experience During Homework and Global Outcomes

Are those students who report more stressful experiences during homework also likely to be anxious or depressed? A study conducted in India (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002) found that middle class students in India reported quite negative emotional states during homework and that time spent during

homework also was related to having more internalizing problems. We pursue that line of inquiry within a middle class sample in the United States by analyzing if affect and motivation reported during homework are related to standardized measures of depression or anxiety.

We also posited that adolescents who reported feeling better about themselves and more productive, able, and in control when doing homework would have higher global self-esteem. Global self-esteem can stem from an adolescent's belief that they are competent in areas important to them (Harter, 2006). Conversely, high self-esteem might lead students to feel better when doing tasks like homework that need to be done. In addition, we tested whether adolescents' reports of concentration, interest, and involvement in their homework are associated with positive expectations for their future attainment. Adolescents who set short term goals, self-regulate their work, and challenge themselves have advantages in achievement and might thus expect to attain their aspirations (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich, 2003). It could also be that high future expectations drive them to concentrate and get involved.

Transitory States During Homework and Grades

Finally, we investigate whether the transitory cognitive, affective, and motivational states during homework are related to students' grades. The 2006 Brown Center Report on American Education (Loveless, 2006) presented findings that, on international comparison study surveys, student confidence and enjoyment of mathematics are strongly negatively related to their achievement. The report raises the question of whether the "happiness" factor is relevant to educational success. We examine relations between affect when doing homework and academic grades.

Summary of Study Goals

In summary, this study investigates three issues using data collected with the ESM. First, we describe the time, location, circumstances, and cognitive, affective, and motivational states of adolescents while doing homework. Second, we examine whether adolescents' cognitive, affective, and motivational states differ depending on the context in which homework is done. Specifically, we test whether the quality of homework experience varies by companionship (with peers, parents, or alone) or by whether homework is a primary or secondary activity. Finally, we ask if, controlling for background factors, homework predicts academic grades, academic goals, self-esteem, or adolescents' internalizing or externalizing disorders. The ESM is an excellent method for gathering information about daily experiences because it allows us to gather multiple samples from the same adolescent about immediate experiences rather than the one time retrospective reports of surveys.

Methods

Participants

Extant data from the University of Chicago Sloan Center 500 Family Study (Schneider & Waite, 2005) were used for secondary analysis. Data were collected between 1999 and 2000 from participants who resided in eight middle and upper-middle class communities. The communities varied in location and demographic characteristics. The present study focuses on 331 adolescent participants (the remaining children in the study were kindergarten-age and thus were not included in the present study). As shown in Table 1, the sample used in this analysis is 59% female and 86% White.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

	%
Gender	
Male	41
Female	59
Grade level	
High school	79
Middle school	21
Race	
White	86
Non-white	14

Procedures

Data were collected from these adolescents using multiple methods including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and the Experience Sampling Method (ESM; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). The ESM is a week-long data collection process during which participants wear wristwatches that are programmed to emit 8 signals each day. In the present study watches were set to beep randomly in two-hour time blocks during participants' waking hours, with the restriction that no two signals were closer than 20 minutes apart. In response to each signal, participants completed a brief 1-page questionnaire in which they answered a number of open-ended and scaled questions about their location, activities, companions, and psychological states at the time. Each questionnaire took 60-90 seconds to complete. The adolescents in the sample responded to an average of 34 signals over the course of a week. Open-ended questions about participants' locations and activities were coded by trained coders using detailed coding schemes. Inter-rater reliabilities for ESM coding, based on person agreement, ranged from .79 to .95 (Schneider & Waite, 2005). The ESM questionnaire used in the current study can be found in Hektner, Schmidt, and Csikszentmihalyi (2007, pp. 296-297).

The ESM has been shown to have strong psychometric properties (for reviews, see Hektner et al., 2007; Schneider & Waite, 2005). The method has a high degree of external or “ecological” validity, capturing participants’ responses in everyday life. Moreover, findings indicate that respondents are generally truthful in reporting their immediate subjective experience (Larson & Richards, 1994). There are indications that the internal validity of the ESM is stronger than one-time questionnaires as well. Zuzanek (1999) has shown that the immediacy of the questions reduces the potential for failure of recall and the tendency to choose responses on the basis of social desirability. Moreover, the fact that participants are signaled randomly diminishes the reflexivity bias, or attempts of respondents to figure out the purpose of the research and respond accordingly (Kubey, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Zuzanek). Further evidence of the internal validity of ESM items comes from the logic of the responses themselves. Emotional states that one would expect to co-occur, in fact, are reported at the same time, and those that are opposite are not. For instance, one study reported a correlation between being “happy” and “social” to be .52, while the correlation between “happy” and “unselfconscious” was -.09 (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Traditional methods of test-retest reliability on participant reports of internal states are generally not applicable to ESM data since the purpose of ESM is to measure how these states vary by context. Researchers more often rely on what has been called “situational validity” by examining the internal logic of a reported situation, checking whether reported internal states are consistent with what one might expect given the reported activities and context. For instance, individuals report being very relaxed when watching television, and students in school report the highest levels of concentration when they are taking exams. The very fact that the results represent “obvious” or “normal” patterns of experience speaks well for the validity of the method (see Hektner et al. for a review).

Available evidence suggests that the procedure itself is minimally disruptive to normal activity. In debriefing surveys administered at the end of the signaling week, the vast majority of participants (80%-90%) report having a “normal” week and that the ESM captured their week well (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987). In a sample of adult ESM participants, about one-fifth reported that the signals disrupted their daily routine (Hormuth, 1986). Analyses of adolescents’ ESM responses suggest that signals that occur in the context of school are perceived by youth as less disruptive than signals occurring in other contexts such as paid employment and sporting events, as indicated by higher response rates while in school (Mulligan, Schneider, & Wolfe, 2000). Other studies have attempted to address the possibility of reactivity – the methodological confound that occurs when participants’ behavior changes as a direct

result of participation in the study. Larson and Richards (1994) asked families participating in the ESM, "Do you think the family's week was different because of the study?" (pp. 267-268). Over half of participants responded "not at all," and no one said "very much" (see Hektner et al., 2007 for a review).

Measures

We defined *homework* as those ESM responses in which students were doing schoolwork outside of class, and those times when students were in class but reported doing work for a different class. Because data are gathered at multiple time points from individuals, the data set contains 1,315 instances of homework. Each time students reported their activities, they identified them as either *primary* ("the main thing you were doing") or *secondary* ("what else were you doing"); thus, each homework response was categorized as primary or secondary, based on students' responses. The physical *location* where students reported completing their homework was also recorded. The categories we used were (a) home, (b) at school, not in class, (c) in class (if adolescent specifically was doing homework as opposed to seatwork); and (d) public place. We also coded students' *companions* while doing homework. These categories included (a) alone, (b) with peers, and (c) with parents.

The ESM data also provided measures of students' subjective experience while doing homework. Each time students were signaled, they responded to a series of Likert and semantic differential scale items in which they reported on their cognitive, affective, and motivational states, as well as their views about themselves and their abilities at the time.

The analyses presented in this paper focus on 11 of these items from the Experience Sampling Form (ESF) completed by students when they were signaled. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert-scale (0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, and 3 = very much), except for *happiness* which was on a 7-point semantic differential scale (i.e., 1 = very sad, 7 = very happy). We measured students' cognitive state by three separate items where students indicated their level of *concentration* and *involvement* in the activity (e.g., "how well were you concentrating?"), as well as how "hardworking" they felt at the time of the signal, which we called *effort*. Affective variables include single items in which students separately indicated their level of *anger*, *stress*, *enjoyment*, and *happiness* at the time of the signal. Items aimed at capturing students' motivational states include single items in which students indicated their level of *interest* in the activity they were doing at the time of the signal, as well as the degree of *control* that they felt at the time. Finally, analyses included 2 indicators of adolescents' self-views: the first is an indicator of the student's view of his or her *ability* for the task at hand. The second indicator, which we refer to as *good about self*, is

an item where students had to indicate how good they felt about themselves at the moment they were signaled.

As the ESM is designed to capture participants' in-the-moment experiences, we were able to select only those instances in which students reported doing homework and examine their subjective experiences at these moments. As such, we constructed measures of students' effort, anger, stress, enjoyment, interest, and control that specifically reflected those moments when students were engaged in homework. Additionally, we assessed students' views of their ability while doing homework, as well as how good they felt about themselves. The flexibility of the ESM also allowed us to examine whether students' subjective experience while doing homework varied systematically by their physical location (e.g., home vs. public), their companions (e.g., with parents vs. peers), or by whether homework was a student's primary or secondary activity.

Surveys provided indicators of students' demographic characteristics including gender, race (due to the homogeneity of the sample, students were characterized as white vs. non-white), and grade level (middle school vs. high school). The surveys also included several widely used measures that we used as outcome variables. *Depression* was measured using the 20-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), which measures the frequency of depressive symptoms experienced by respondents over the course of the previous week (Radloff, 1977). For these data, the reliability of this scale as indicated by Cronbach's alpha was .89. We measured adolescents' *anxiety* using the 8-item Taylor's Anxiety Inventory (Taylor & Tomasic, 1996), which yielded an alpha reliability of .85. Adolescents' *global self-esteem* was assessed using Rosenberg's 5-item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979), which had an alpha reliability of .81. We constructed a composite indicator of students' *behavioral problems* using 25 survey items indicating how often students had gotten into trouble at school or in their communities. This measure was constructed simply by taking the mean of all 25 items, so higher scores indicate more behavior problems. The alpha reliability of this scale was .82. A measure of students' *future expectations* was constructed from 13 survey items in which students indicated the likelihood that they would achieve "success" in their future academic, professional, and personal lives (examples of items include: the future likelihood of having a job that pays well, being able to own one's own home, being respected in the community, having a happy family life, having a healthy life, etc.). This measure was constructed by taking the mean of all 13 items, such that higher scores indicate more positive future expectations. The alpha reliability of this scale was .87. Finally, students reported their cumulative grades in school. *Grade point average (GPA)* is represented on a 1 (mostly Ds) to 4 (mostly A's) scale. Means and standard deviations for all variables used in analyses can be found in the appendix.

Analyses

Our first set of analyses is a series of simple descriptive statistics indicating how often, where, and with whom adolescents do homework. Second, we use paired-samples t-tests to compare students’ quality of experience in each of these homework contexts. While repeated measures ANOVAs would have been a more desirable analysis, this was not possible because not all participants produced homework reports in each of the contexts examined. To guard against Type I error, the significance levels of the t-tests were adjusted to account for the multiple tests conducted. Finally, we use a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models to explore the relationship between students’ daily subjective experience while doing homework and the global outcomes of interest (depression, anxiety, self-esteem, behavioral problems, future expectations, and grades). All regression analyses also control for gender, race, and grade level.

Results

General Description of Homework

Twenty-three percent of all adolescents’ responses occurred when they were doing homework, which indicates that the youth in our sample spent about 3.7 hours each day on homework. (Note: We computed this figure by multiplying 23 – % of homework responses – by 16 – the estimated number of adolescents’ waking hours a day – and dividing the product by 100.) When doing homework, students reported it was the primary activity 77% of the time. Students were alone approximately half of the time that they did homework, and about 65% of all homework responses occurred while students were at home. Table 2 displays details.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Homework Time Use (*N* = 1315 homework instances, and *N* = 331 students)

Homework Contexts	N	%
Primary vs. Secondary Activity		
Homework as primary activity	1009	76.7
Homework as secondary activity	306	23.3
Location where Homework is Completed		
Home	861	65.5
School (not in class)	237	18.0
Class	151	11.5
Public place	66	5.0
Companionship		
Friends/peers	256	19.5
Parents	148	11.3
Alone	657	50.0

Note: The frequencies for companionship do not add up to 100 because some participants reported being with people other than their parents or peers while doing homework.

Comparison of Affect and Motivation in Different Homework Contexts

Students' affect when doing homework appears to depend on who they are with when they are doing homework, as well as whether homework was their primary or secondary activity. As the results in Table 3 indicate, when homework was the primary activity, adolescents reported higher levels of negative affect (i.e., anger and stress) as well as higher levels of cognitive engagement (e.g. control, effort, and involvement). Adolescents reported higher levels of positive affect (i.e., enjoyment of activity and interest) when homework was a secondary activity.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-test of Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Ratings When Homework is Primary vs. Secondary Activity

	Primary		Secondary		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Anger	.65	.55	.49	.57	143	3.19	.002
Ability	2.17	.74	2.13	.87	143	.75	.453
Good about self	1.97	.71	1.90	.84	144	1.37	.172
Happiness	4.54	1.06	4.85	1.21	138	-2.96	.004
Interest	1.22	.77	1.41	.90	144	-2.53	.012
Concentration	1.93	.70	1.74	.83	144	.30	.005
Stress level	.88	.71	.72	.81	141	2.44	.016
Effort	1.63	.85	1.46	.98	141	2.21	.029
Enjoy activity	1.10	.76	1.39	.89	144	-3.49	.001
Control	2.02	.77	1.84	.89	144	2.80	.006
Involvement	1.87	.95	1.70	.99	144	2.28	.024

In general, adolescents reported more positive affect when they were doing homework with a companion than alone. As can be seen in Table 4, for example, they enjoyed the activity more and were happier with both parents and friends than when alone. Negative emotions were more common alone than with friends; more anger and stress was reported while completing homework alone than with friends. Adolescents did not report being angrier or more stressed with parents compared to when they were either alone or with friends. Cognitive engagement, however, was greater when alone. Adolescents reported greater effort and more control when alone than with friends and greater concentration both when alone and with parents than with friends.

Table 4. Paired Samples T-tests of Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Ratings of Doing Homework with Different Companions

	Alone vs. Friends			Alone vs. Parents			Friends vs. Parents		
	<i>M</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>t</i>
Anger	.68	.58	-2.15*	.74	.75	.12	.56	.76	-1.81
Ability	2.23	2.21	-.39	2.11	2.11	-.06	2.01	2.13	-1.10
Good about self	1.99	1.97	-.30	1.84	1.86	.21	1.79	1.69	.94
Happiness	4.38	4.94	6.25***	4.29	4.70	2.10*	4.85	4.64	.823
Concentration	2.00	1.75	-3.61***	1.90	2.03	1.08	1.67	1.97	-2.19*
Interest	1.25	1.41	1.98*	1.16	1.35	1.70	1.35	1.40	-.44
Stress level	1.01	.87	-2.03*	1.08	1.13	.46	.86	1.12	-1.99
Effort	1.76	1.48	-3.52**	1.83	1.66	-1.44	1.40	1.61	-1.38
Enjoy activity	1.09	1.35	3.13**	.97	1.26	2.38*	1.34	1.35	-.08
Control	2.16	1.88	-4.13***	1.99	1.96	-.33	1.64	1.86	-1.82
Involvement	1.88	1.80	-1.04	1.83	1.76	-.65	1.70	1.77	-.45

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: Because many participants did not have homework observations in each of the companion contexts examined, paired t-tests were necessary rather than repeated measures MANOVA. As a result, means for any given context (e.g., alone, friends, parents) vary slightly from analysis to analysis.

Relationship Between Homework and Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes

Regression analyses suggest a complex relationship between students' homework and the outcomes of interest. While the amount of time students spent on homework was only rarely and inconsistently associated with any of the outcomes of interest, controlling for background characteristics of age, gender, and race, we found consistent associations between students' quality of experience while doing homework and each of the outcomes examined here. Table 5 displays the beta coefficients for the cognitive, affective, and motivational variables and the adjusted R squared for each equation. Student reports of negative affect (e.g., anger, stress) were negatively related to global measures of self-esteem, and positively related to internalizing disorders like depression and anxiety. Momentary reports of positive affect, such as feeling good about self, were negatively related to internalizing disorders and positively related to self-esteem and future expectations. Student reports of happiness – another indicator of positive affect – were also related positively to self-esteem and school grades. Students' momentary reports of ability were related to self-esteem, future expectations, and grades.

Motivational aspects of homework experiences such as interest, control, and enjoyment were positively related to self-esteem; effort was related positively

Table 5. Regression Analyses of Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Homework States Predicting Outcomes while Controlling for Background Factors

	Depression		Anxiety		Self-esteem		Behavioral Problems		Grades		Future Expectations	
	β	Adj. R ²	β	Adj. R ²	β	Adj. R ²	β	Adj. R ²	β	Adj. R ²	β	Adj. R ²
Anger	.21**	.03	.25***	.06	-.16*	.02	.08	.06	.01	.06	-.01	-.02
Ability	-.14	.01	-.14	.02	.24***	.06	-.04	.05	.14*	.09	.24***	.04
Good about self	-.24**	.05	-.17**	.03	.43***	.18	-.02	.05	.09	.08	.27***	.06
Happiness	-.15	.01	-.09	.01	.26***	.06	-.00	.05	.23***	.04	.23	.04
Interest	-.09	-.01	-.12	.01	.17**	.03	-.02	.05	.02	.07	.17	.02
Concentration	-.45	-.01	-.08	.01	.08	.01	-.18**	.08	.04	.07	.15	.01
Stress level	.30***	.07	.24***	.05	-.18**	.03	.06	.05	.05	.06	-.03	-.02
Effort	-.02	-.01	-.06	.00	.17**	.03	-.13*	.07	.12(!)	.08	.18	.02
Enjoy activity	-.02	-.01	-.03	.00	.16**	.02	.03	.05	-.07	.07	.14	.01
Control	-.19*	.03	-.13	.02	.30***	.09	-.01	.05	.09	.08	.30***	.08
Involvement	-.03	-.01	-.01	-.01	.08	.01	-.01	.05	.05	.07	.13	.01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, (!) $p = .05$.

Note: Separate regression analyses were run for each cognitive, affective, and motivational state controlling for background factors, age, gender, and race.

to both self-esteem and grades, and negatively to behavioral problems. Control was associated positively with future expectations and self-esteem, and negatively with depression. Students' reports of concentration while doing homework were negatively associated with behavioral problems.

Before proceeding further, the reader must be cautioned that many of the models specified here explain only a small portion of the variance in the outcomes of interests. In particular, the regression models generally do a poor job of explaining variance in global depression and anxiety, with adjusted R^2 s hovering around 0. The models do a slightly better job of explaining variance in the other outcomes, with adjusted R^2 s reaching as high as .18. Thus, while there are significant associations between one's subjective experience and these global outcomes – even after controlling for background factors – only a very small portion of the variance is explained by these models.

Discussion

This study makes several important contributions to the research on homework. First, it provides a detailed description of the contexts in which contemporary students do homework. Relatively little is known about where and with whom students do homework, and these factors are important in understanding how homework can be most beneficial for students. Somewhat surprisingly, given the reports of survey research that adolescents do little homework in the United States (Brown Center on American Education, 2003), adolescents in this sample reported doing homework the equivalent of three hours per day. Perhaps these findings can be attributed to the fact that these reports came from middle and upper-middle class high school students who expect to attend college. Other researchers, for example, have found a discrepancy between the total amount of time low-income urban minority and suburban White high school students spend on homework both in ESM (Larson, Richards, Sims, & Dworkin, 2001) and survey (Rigsby, Stull, & Morse-Kelley, 1997) studies. The much trumpeted national reports of homework time calculate averages for a very diverse population of high school students. Dramatic variation across diverse groups might be expected given the well recognized variation in school quality. More research is needed in examining which characteristics predict how much time is spent on homework in the broader population.

Teachers who assign homework most likely hope that their students will focus on the task assigned, rather than complete assignments as a secondary activity. We found that most students did in fact focus on homework as their primary, though not sole, activity. Many were multitasking while doing homework. The most common secondary activities reported were *being idle* (thinking, daydreaming, resting, nothing) and listening to or watching media. Interestingly, computer usage unrelated to homework was very rare as a secondary activity. Most homework advice given to adolescents or their parents includes admonitions against watching television, the need for quiet while studying, and computer access and use (see, e.g., Kids Health, 2007; National Education Association, 2007). Future studies will need to investigate whether there are systematic consequences related to these various secondary activities.

Adolescents reported doing about one-third of their homework in a place other than home, predominantly in school. Many high school students have one study period set aside in their schedule. The amount of time students reported doing homework at school, but not in class, corresponds roughly to about one period per day. Of some concern is the 11.5% of the time students reported doing homework *in class*. This is consistent with findings of an earlier study in which adolescents reported doing a portion of their homework in class (Leone & Richards, 1989). Stigler and Hiebert (1999) found that this tendency to do homework in class was more characteristic of U.S. than Japanese eighth grade mathematics classrooms. One problem with this practice is that students miss out on instructional time if they are completing homework.

Students were alone approximately half of the time that they did homework. Given that one recognized purpose of homework is to encourage parental involvement, we found that parents were involved for a relatively short amount of time. This might be because adolescents want autonomy and parents grant it or because parents expect homework to be their children's responsibility. The high grade point average of the students who participated in this study offers another explanation in that parents of adolescents tend to be far more actively involved with homework when their children are struggling with school work and earning low grades (Shumow & Miller, 2001).

We also systematically examined students' subjective perceptions of their homework experiences; few studies have considered the student perspective in their analysis of homework. Results indicate that students' subjective experience varies by the context in which they complete homework. Adolescent reports of more negative affect when homework is a primary activity are balanced by higher reported cognitive engagement in the same context. Not surprisingly, concentration on the task was higher and affect was more negative when completing homework alone compared to with friends. Although it seems that

these adolescents feel better and thus would likely prefer doing homework as a secondary activity with friends, they are likely to accomplish more when they are alone.

Anecdotes which have appeared in the popular press or in trade books about family battles and intense stress accompanying parent assistance with homework were not substantiated by the reports of the adolescents in this study. Surely, some adolescents experience anger and stress when doing homework with parents, but, overall, this was not an issue. Arguments that homework battles are damaging families do not appear to apply to this sample.

Several consistent relationships were identified between quality of experience while doing homework and outcomes beyond academic achievement such as global psychological and behavioral outcomes. If the association of these transitory states with long term outcomes are upheld in future studies designed to reveal causal links, then serious discussion about what outcomes are most valued and at what cost seems especially important given the co-occurrence of transitory states like positive affect and low engagement in one context and negative affect and greater effort in another context. It would also be important to examine ways to optimize positive states and outcomes while mitigating negative ones. In the present study, we were not able to examine direction of effects, so it will be important in future research to determine if students who are anxious or depressed might benefit from techniques like learning stress reduction strategies.

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in future studies. First, the participants in this study were drawn from middle and upper-middle class communities and were predominantly White. Readers should take care not to over-generalize the results of this study, then, to other groups of adolescents. Second, it is not possible to disentangle any direction of effects in the relationship between transitory states and more global outcome measures. A longitudinal study might be able to track whether and how changes in either predict subsequent changes in the other within subjects. A longitudinal study would also allow an examination of changes in time spent and subjective experiences of homework across adolescence. There are many different types of homework ranging from rote drill and practice to work on creative and complex projects. It would be of great interest to educators to know about how students' subjective experiences vary when doing different types of homework.

Despite these limitations, it is our hope that researchers and practitioners will consider the student perspective in planning studies, crafting homework policies, or designing homework activities. Ultimately, student motivation, affect, and cognition about homework will very likely influence how well adolescents do and how much they learn from their homework.

References

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Bempechat, J. (2004). The motivational benefits of homework: A social-cognitive perspective. *Theory into Practice*, 43(3), 189-196.
- Brown Center on American Education. (2003). *Do students have too much homework?* Brown Center Report on American Education. Brookings Institute. Retrieved September 5, 2006 from www.brookings.edu/gs/brown/20031001homework.htm
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the twenty-first century*. New York: Carnegie Foundation.
- Cooper, H. (1989). *Homework*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Cooper, H., Robinson, J., & Patall, E. (2006). Does homework improve academic achievement?: A synthesis of research 1987 – 2003. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(1), 1-62.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Larson, R. (1984). *Being adolescent: Conflict and growth in the teenage years*. New York: Basic Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Larson, R. (1987). Validity and reliability of the experience sampling method. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 175, 526-536.
- Daniels, D., & Shumow, L. (2002). Child development and classroom teaching: A review of the literature and implications for educating teachers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 23, 495-526.
- Eccles, J. (1983). Expectancies, values and academic behaviors. In J. T. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives: Psychological and sociological approaches* (pp 75-146). San Francisco: Freeman.
- Eccles, J., & Harold, A. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescent's schooling. In A. Booth & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes* (pp. 3-34). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Harmon, M., Smith, T., Martin, M., Kelly, D., Beaton, A., Mullis, I., et al. (1997). *Performance assessment in IEA's Third International Mathematics and Science Study*, The International Study Center at Boston College.
- Harter, S. (2006). The development of self-representations in childhood and adolescence. In W. Damon & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Hektner, J., Schmidt, J. A., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2007). *Measuring the quality of everyday life: The ESM handbook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hormuth, S. E. (1986). The sampling of experiences *in situ*. *Journal of Personality*, 54, 262-293.
- Kantrowitz, B., & Wingert, P. (2001, January 29). The parent trap, *Newsweek*, 137(5), 49-55.
- Kids Health. (2007). Helping your teen with homework. Retrieved January 28, 2007 from http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/help_teen_homework.html
- Kralovec, E., & Buell, J. (2000). *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Kubey, R., Larson, R., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). Experience sampling method applications to communication research questions. *Journal of Communication*, 46, 99-120.
- Larson, R., & Richards, M. H. (1994). *Divergent realities: The emotional lives of mothers, fathers, and adolescents*. New York: Basic Books.
- Larson, R., Richards, M., Sims, B., & Dworkin, J. (2001). How urban African-American adolescents spend their time: Time budgets for activities, locations, and companionship. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(4), 565-597.
- Leone, C., & Richards, M. (1989). Classwork and homework in early adolescence: The ecology of achievement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 18(6), 531-548.
- Loveless, T. (2003). *How well are American students learning? The 2003 Brown Center Report on American Education*. Retrieved July 13, 2006 from http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2003/10education_loveless.aspx
- Loveless, T. (2006). *How well are American students learning? 2006 Brown Center Report on American Education*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute.
- Mulligan, C. B., Schneider, B., & Wolfe, R. N. (2000). *Time use and population representation in the Sloan Study of Adolescents*. Unpublished manuscript, Alfred P. Sloan/University of Chicago Center for the Study of Working Families.
- National Education Association. (2007). *Helping your student get the most out of homework*. Retrieved January 28, 2007 from <http://www.nea.org/parents/homework.html>
- Phelan, P., Davidson, A. L., & Yu, H. C. (1998). *Adolescents' worlds: Negotiating family, peers, and school*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Pintrich, P. (2003). Motivation for classroom learning. In I. B. Weiner (Ed.), *Handbook of psychology* (Vol. 7). New York: Wiley.
- Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 1, 385-401.
- Rigsby, L. C., Stull, J. C., & Morse-Kelley, N. (1997). Determinants of student educational expectations and achievement: Race/ethnicity and gender differences. In R. D. Taylor & M. C. Wang (Eds.), *Social and emotional adjustment and family relations in ethnic minority families* (pp. 201-223). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schneider, B., & Waite, L. J. (2005). *Being together, working apart: Dual-career families and the work-life balance* (pp. 277-296). New York: Cambridge.
- Shumow, L., & Miller, J. (2001). Father's and mother's school involvement during early adolescence. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 21, 69-92.
- Stigler, J., & Hiebert J. (1999). *The teaching gap: Best ideas for improving education in the classroom*. New York: The Free Press.
- Snyder, T. (1998). Trends in education. *Principal*, 78(1), 40, 42, 44, 46-48.
- Taylor, J., & Tomic, M. (1996). Taylor's measures of dysphoria, anxiety, anger, and self-esteem. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of tests and measurements for black populations* (pp. 295-305). Hampton: Cobb & Henry.
- Verma, S., Sharma, D., & Larson, R. (2002). School stress in India: Effects on time and daily emotions. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 26(6), 500-508.
- Warton, P. (2001). The forgotten voices in homework: Views of students. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3), 155-165.
- Xu, J. (2004). Family help and homework management in urban and rural secondary schools. *Teachers College Record*, 106(9), 1786-1803.
- Zuzanek, J. (1999, May 27-28). *Experience sampling method: Current and potential research applications*. Paper presented at the Workshop on Measurement of and Research on Time Use, National Research Council, Washington, DC.

Lee Shumow is a professor of educational psychology at Northern Illinois University where she is a Presidential Teaching Professor. Her research focuses on out of school influences (e.g., activities, relationships, resources) on the school adjustment of children and adolescents. She has conducted several studies of homework using different methodologies. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lee Shumow, Northern Illinois University, LEPF Department, DeKalb, IL, 60115.

Jennifer A. Schmidt is an associate professor of educational psychology at Northern Illinois University. Her current research focuses on adolescent engagement in school and extracurricular activities. She has conducted research using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) for the past 15 years and served as director of research for the study that produced the data used in this paper.

Hayal Kackar is currently a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University. Her current research interests include positive youth development, in general, and adolescents' engagement in community service activities, in particular.

Author's Note: This article is based on a paper presented at American Educational Research Association, April 2007, Chicago, IL.

Appendix: Descriptive Analysis of All Measures

Measures	M	SD	Range	N
Cognitive, Affective and Motivational Measures (measured via ESM)				
Concentration	1.96	.68	.00-3.00	330
Involvement	1.84	.92	.00-3.00	327
Effort	1.72	.83	.00-3.00	326
Anger	.62	.60	.00-3.00	327
Stress level	.86	.78	.00-3.00	325
Enjoy activity	1.20	.79	.00-3.00	329
Happiness	4.70	1.05	1.00-7.00	317
Interest	1.33	.78	.00-3.00	330
Control	2.06	.74	.00-3.00	329
Ability	2.27	.70	.00-3.00	329
Good about self	2.03	.72	.00-3.00	330
Outcome Measures (measured via one-time survey)				
Depression	14.88	9.37	.00-60.00	284
Anxiety	1.61	.69	.00-4.00	285
Self-esteem	2.85	.66	.00-4.00	291
Behavioral Problems	.25	.22	.00-3.00	276
Future Expectations	3.96	.51	1.00-5.00	277
Grades	3.64	.58	1.00-4.00	294

Race and Class Challenges in Community Collaboration for Educational Change

*Linwood H. Cousins, Roslyn A. Mickelson, Brian Williams,
and Anne Velasco*

Abstract

This article reports the challenges of race and social class in an action research project to facilitate educational change through community collaboration with African American parents, community organizations, and public schools. This project was undertaken in Charlotte, North Carolina to enhance the participation of African American parents in their children's math and science course selection and placement in middle and high school. Focusing on the communities of three high schools and their feeder middle schools, this article reports important lessons and outlines strategic implications for future work in the intersection among African American communities, public schools and education, and universities.

Key Words: African American parents, race, class, community collaboration, parent education, the change process, equity, involvement, partnerships

Introduction

From 2002 through 2005, a university-community partnership called the Math/Science Equity Program (MSEP) worked to increase African American parental involvement in high school math and science course selections in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Based at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), MSEP's goal was to reduce the race gaps in higher-level

math and science course enrollments, and by doing so, contribute to reducing the race gap in academic achievement and attainment. MSEP was designed as a series of community-based parent enrichment workshops that built upon parents' existing knowledge. It developed their additional knowledge, skills, strategies, and social networks and created capacities for future collaborations among parents. Our multi-ethnic team of researcher-activists collaborated with several community organizations including the public schools, libraries, parks and recreation department, several churches, and a number of non-profit organizations in the development and implementation of our program.

This article focuses on the inexorable challenges inherent in such university-community collaborations, particularly those that, like MSEP, are action research projects aimed at educational reform. The article describes the lessons learned about the organizational, political, and interpersonal challenges that are inherent in efforts such as MSEP. Specifically, by describing and analyzing racial and, to a lesser degree, social class identity issues and the politics we found at the heart of these collaborations, we hope to offer meaningful lessons and insights to others who undertake collaborative relationships among public schools, universities, and communities.

Why Focus on the Collaboration Process?

Research-driven collaborations and partnerships among universities, communities, and schools are necessary to advance knowledge and educational opportunities to all, but they are loaded with many unforeseen issues (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007; Anyon & Fernandez, 2007; Harkavy, 2006). Interpersonal and political issues related to power dynamics, trust, and identity processes are just a few of the potential challenges such collaborations face (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2006). Contextual issues invariably make this so, which in our case include historical and contemporary educational inequalities related to race, social class, and the specifics of the political economy in Charlotte, North Carolina where our work occurred (Caine, 2007; Smith, 2004). Consequently, despite MSEP's considerable successes, we faced – and this article highlights – barriers, hurdles, and contradictions in building partnerships with organizations and citizens across the Charlotte community.

The challenges we describe in this article are process issues often absent from the research literature on university-community collaborations for parental involvement in education. Highlighting these challenges may lead to cynicism about this kind of work (Brodsky et al., 2004; Miller, 2004). However, we believe we can offer necessary lessons and key insights from examining our experiences with the analytic and theoretical tools we bring to this endeavor.

This article sheds light on the tensions among actors from diverse social class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and with varying stations of power and privilege in the Charlotte community, as their interests and motivations converge and diverge in the course of implementing a program that all participants believe had value. We begin with a description of the political economy of educational reform in Charlotte and the project's origins and characteristics. We follow with a discussion of theoretical and practice-based tenets that informed and guided our work. To that we add a discussion of how identity politics and processes challenged and oft-times created barriers to collaborative work. A set of vignettes about our parental recruitment efforts provides the core qualitative data for this article.¹ Drawing upon the qualitative data we collected during the implementation of our project, we illustrate the organizational, political, and interpersonal challenges our team faced. We conclude with a summary of lessons learned and their implications.

The Political Economy of Educational Reform in Charlotte, North Carolina

The Math/Science Equity Program was a direct outgrowth of the authors' prior research on the race gap in higher-level math and science courses among students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). From roughly 1975 to 2002 the CMS district operated under mandatory court orders to desegregate. The district was well known for its desegregation plan, which utilized mandatory busing and other strategies (*Swann v. Charlotte*, 1971). In 2002, the district became unified and no longer made any efforts to racially balance student assignments to schools. As a consequence, CMS is rapidly resegregating by race and social class (Mickelson, 2003; Mickelson & Southworth, 2005).

Until 2002, CMS was a majority White district. By December 2005,² the student population of CMS was 126,903, comprised of 43% African American, 37% White, 12% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 3% Native American and multiracial. CMS faces the academic and social challenges other urban school systems face when their schools have concentrations of poor, low-performing students. At the same time that the schools in the central core of the district were becoming low-performing and high-poverty segregated minority schools, the suburban schools in the north and south of the district were becoming overcrowded, segregated, White, high-performing schools.

When CMS was released from court orders to desegregate in 2002, many of the district's schools were racially balanced. With exceptions in the outlying suburbs and city core, about two-thirds of CMS's 140 schools had between

57% and 26% minority students. However, within all schools, even desegregated ones, students were resegregated by academic grouping and tracking (Mickelson, 2001; Southworth & Mickelson, 2007). 1997 surveys of CMS eighth graders and high school seniors revealed that disproportionate numbers of academically bright African American youths were enrolled in lower-level math and science courses. That is, White high school students were more likely to take Advanced Placement (AP) or gifted/honors courses than Blacks with similar prior achievement, family SES, college-oriented peer groups, and effort (Mickelson, 2001).

A subsequent qualitative study investigated this gap in higher-level course enrollment (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006; Mickelson, Velasco, Maples, & Greene, 2002). We conducted about 150 in-depth interviews with African American and White students and their parents and educators about how high school courses were selected. The interviews revealed that although all parents want the best for their children, parents' knowledge of school system processes, choices, and strategies used by school personnel frequently varied with parents' social class and history. We found that African American parents were at a clear disadvantage compared to middle-class White parents who were more knowledgeable about the way the school system operated, who key gatekeepers were, and when important decisions had to be made for optimizing students' academic trajectories. Middle-class White parents also had better networks, were more familiar with the math and science course sequences, and were more likely to use varied social and political strategies to influence school personnel on behalf of their children's educational careers than either middle-class Blacks or most working class families.

The Math/Science Equity Program's Workshops

The heart of our university-community collaboration was the Math/Science Equity Program's HOME Workshops. MSEP's approach centered on parental empowerment workshops where participants received information about the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system's high school math and science course sequences and the sequence's relationship to postsecondary education and professional careers.

HOME workshops' content and processes were developed in conjunction with multiple community groups, educators, and parents. Throughout the design and implementation process, the researcher-activist team from UNCC worked intimately with a Community Advisory Council (CAC) on the goals, content, scope, curricula, recruitment, and evaluation components of the project.³ For example, at the suggestion of our CAC we developed the acronym

HOME (Helping Ourselves Mold Education) as a user-friendly name for MSEP's parent workshops, the first phase of our project. We used the phrase "HOME workshops" in our interactions with community groups rather than the Math/Science Equity Program, because the latter seems too officious.

The MSEP team presented the complete set of HOME workshops in a six-week format.⁴ Weekly sessions were roughly two and one-half hours in length. Workshops were considered "enrichment sessions" that built upon extant parental knowledge and skills. Parents who attended learned about their educational rights under the North Carolina constitution. They engaged in hands-on math and science activities and participated in role playing designed to equip them for effectively managing their children's educational careers. Community organizations such as the public libraries, parks and recreation department, several churches, and a number of non-profit organizations collaborated with MSEP by providing space, publicity, personnel, and expertise.

What began as child care and educational enrichment activities for participants' children became a parallel children's math and science program once the children started to request an opportunity to do the same kinds of "fun" hands-on math and science that their parents were doing. The children's program became so popular, a number of parents attended the enrichment sessions merely because their children wanted to attend the children's program!

Workshop sites varied in order to maximize convenience for parents. They included the UNC Charlotte campus, community recreation centers, public schools, public libraries, and local churches. All parent participants and their children shared a meal with the MSEP team during HOME workshops. We provided transportation on an as-needed basis. We established a website at www.msep.uncc.edu and developed a project newsletter, "Letters From HOME," that we mailed out every two months. Several parent graduates of the workshops worked in conjunction with MSEP staff to develop an autonomous parent organization to succeed the workshops as a source of ongoing leadership training, networking, and information.

MSEP was designed as a quasi-experiment. Therefore, we selected three high schools and their feeder middle schools to receive MSEP workshops. We then matched these treatment high schools with three others that served as our control sites. Only parents of students who attended our treatment schools were eligible to participate in workshops. We expected parents who attended workshops would become more involved in their children's course selection, more of their children would enroll in high level math and science courses, and the increases in high level math and science enrollments among African American students attending our treatment schools would exceed increases in enrollments in our control schools.

Community Collaboration and Identity Practice for MSEP Workshops

MSEP was built on a foundation of community organization and development theory and practice (Fisher, 1994; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; McKnight, 1995; Rivera & Erlich, 1995). We expanded upon this theoretical and experiential foundation with knowledge about working with non-white and low-income communities (Dryfoos, 1994; Epstein et al., 2007; Ewalt, Freeman, & Poole, 1998; Moses & Cobb, 2001). The broad literature of community collaboration and school-family-community partnerships (Cousins, Williams, & Battani, 1998; Epstein, 1995, 2001; Fisher; Fisher & Karger, 1997; Gutierrez, 1997; Moses & Cobb; National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007) suggest the following action research approaches:

- consider a community's social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics in contemporary and historical contexts;
- include indigenous and official community stakeholders and leaders in development and implementation activities;
- employ an empowerment model that builds on the strengths of participants;
- resist "top down" approaches in which social service agency experts or academics unilaterally control and enforce programs for community residents; and,
- take into account the social and cultural norms and interests that motivate and give meaning to the lives of people in whose communities change is sought.

Community collaboration for community education involves overlapping spheres of influence among families, communities, and schools (Cain et al., 2007; Epstein, 1995, 2001; Epstein et al., 2007; ICR, 2004). Community organization or development – referred to as "collaboration" in this article – means

efforts to mobilize people who are directly affected by a community condition...([especially] the unaffiliated, the unorganized, and the nonparticipating) into groups and organizations to enable them to take action on the social problems and issues that concern them (Rivera & Erlich, 1995, p. 3).

Consequently, among other practices, MSEP included community members in all aspects of its work. Community members were involved in defining and delivering what MSEP offered parents. Indeed, Fisher's ideal of "letting the community members decide" (1994; Anyon & Fernandez, 2007) was a constant leitmotif in our deliberations.

Non-White and Low-Income Communities

Communities of color – especially African American communities in the particular context of school reform and related educational efforts – have their own experiences with community collaboration (Dryfoos, 1994; Ewalt, Freeman, & Poole, 1998; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Gold, 2006; Hilliard, 1989; Moses & Cobb, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).⁵ These and other experiences in education-related change in African American communities suggest that to meet the goals of projects such as MSEP, change efforts must transcend barriers that limit meaningful and effective parental and community participation.⁶ Barriers include (a) planning that excludes a community's cultural beliefs, values, and perceptions about the source of problems and their solutions, and (b) exclusion from participation in the development and implementation of change efforts – an issue of power (Castelloe, Watson, & White, 2002; Fisher, 1994; Grossman & Gumz, 2003; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2006).

Consider Robert Moses' work on community numeracy in the rural South (Moses & Cobb, 2001). Moses' Algebra Project and school reform activities in the Mississippi Delta and elsewhere use some very basic community organizing notions he learned and practiced in the civil rights movement of the 1960s (pp. xiii, xiv, 19, 21): give voice to the voiceless; tap into community and family; help adults be there for children; make families central to the work of organizing; and organize in the context of the community in which one works and lives. We added to these principles several tenets from Epstein's research on working in the nexus of school-family-community partnerships (1995, 2001). We developed "school-like" networks where the importance of school, homework, and related activities are highlighted for students and parents, and we increased parents' capacities to be the main source of information about school (1995, pp. 702-705).

In sum, community collaboration for community education requires that researcher-activists utilize overlapping spheres of influence among families, communities, and schools (Epstein, 1995, 2001). We envisioned our role (in terms of community organizer and program developer) as a catalyst or facilitator of change, rather than as autonomous leaders or educators (Gutierrez, 1997). We believed it was necessary to address the community's social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics in contemporary and historical contexts. Collaboration must include indigenous and official community stakeholders and leaders in development and implementation activities. We sought to employ an empowerment model that built upon the strengths of participants. Finally, we attempted to center our efforts in community education, participation, and capacity building.

Identity and Interpersonal Relations in Community Collaboration

Seldom do university-community collaborations unfold as planned (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2006). To make sense of the particular, interpersonally driven barriers and conflicts we discuss in this article, we turned to the literature on identity processes (Harper et al., 2004). Community collaboration is interpersonal by default. It may comprise one-to-one conversations, individual presentations to small or large groups, or simple conversations between small groups of individuals. Such face-to-face interactions are laden with all sorts of emotions, attitudes, cultural values, and cognitive styles and strategies. Additional issues include one's status as community insider or outsider, how one enters into a working relationship in a community, the macro-level dynamics that influence one-on-one relationships, and the mutual influence community members and researchers exert on one another (Brodsky et al., 2004; Miller, 2004; Suarez-Balcazar et al.). We believe identity processes are part and parcel of interpersonal relations.

John Ogbu's description of *community forces* in Black schooling (Ogbu, 2003; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) assists in our analysis. We extend his contributions by theorizing the *identities* of individual actors in a collective with what we call *interpersonal processes*. Identities, accordingly, are based in individuals and the collective to which a person belongs. Individual identities are the "imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products...[They] are psychohistorical formations that develop over a person's lifetime, populating intimate terrain and motivating social life" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5; see also O'Connor, 2001).

Finally, individual and collective identities are "dialogic" in nature (Appiah, 1994; Taylor, 1994), produced in dialogue between people through various sorts of interactions. Indeed, individual identities are constructed in interaction with collective identities from a "tool kit of options made available by our society and culture" (Appiah, p. 155). Collective identities participate as "tool kits" by providing scripts and narratives individuals can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories. In the end, collective identities fit individual identities into a larger narrative – a narrative that tells the what, why, and how of a group's (race/ethnic) existence (Appiah, pp. 160–161).

Taken in the historical context of African American life and schooling in Charlotte, these identity processes set the stage, we believe, for the kind of interpersonal relations – elements of strain, contention, and solidarity – MSEP's researcher-activists experienced in community collaborations with parents and community activists involved in MSEP.

Project Design, Methods, and Data

Based on the empirical findings of racially correlated math and science course placements *and* race and socioeconomic status differences in parental knowledge about and involvement in the course selection process, we envisioned a project that would empower African American parents to be more successful in guiding and managing their children's academic careers in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. To accomplish these goals we developed the Math/Science Equity Program (MSEP), described earlier in this article.

The MSEP Team

Because race and class identity are central to this article's analysis, we describe the demographics of the relatively diverse MSEP team. The two principal investigators (PIs) were an African American male professor and a White female professor. The person with the most direct contact and authority over the HOME workshops was its director, an African American male with a Ph.D. in science education. As a young student, he was told by a counselor that he wasn't college material. Memory of his miseducation fueled the passion with which he led the workshops. In addition to the PIs and the workshop director, the project manager (a White woman) and a group of nine graduate and undergraduate research assistants made up the MSEP team. Student assistants included an Asian Indian, several African American and White students. The multiethnic MSEP team comprised an even mix of men and women and a diverse group of academic disciplines, including sociology, education, anthropology, and social work. The project leadership team (two PIs, a postdoctoral fellow, and a project manager) included two men and two women.

In addition to the UNCC personnel, MSEP also employed a number of community members as recruitment specialists, instructors during workshops, and members of the Community Advisory Council. As mentioned previously, MSEP also worked closely with community-based organizations including churches, schools, and public libraries.

Recruitment

We developed and implemented a formal process for recruiting parents. We held weekly training and marketing strategy sessions with MSEP team members, identified stakeholders that could help us recruit parents, and discussed strategies for collaborating with them. Recruitment strategies included: radio and TV public service announcements; speaking at churches and community organization meetings and with community development program officers; discussions with public housing authorities and parent advocates; meetings

and discussions with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' superintendent and related administrators, teachers, principals, coaches, students, and volunteers; distributing flyers in barbershops, beauty salons, and at grocery stores; and discussions with the Carolina Panthers Football Team and IBM representatives.

Several months into the project we hired two community outreach representatives to recruit parents for HOME workshops. Both individuals were parents who had successfully completed workshops. Ultimately, letters sent by school personnel on MSEP stationery proved to be the most successful strategy for recruitment. Counselors at treatment middle and high schools identified students in our target population – academically able Blacks who were not enrolled in the most challenging math and science classes – and sent their parents invitations to the next HOME workshop. If parents followed up on their invitations, they became the self-selected sample of participants in our project.

Research Design and Data

MSEP was funded for three years by the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation. We employed a mixed methods design. During the entire planning and implementation process we collected extensive qualitative data through field notes, observations, and interviews with participants.

The core quantitative data from the project came from the implementation of a “treatment” or intervention (in the form of HOME and Teen Summit workshops, although the data, lessons, and implications in this article are based on data from HOME workshops) using a quasi-experimental design. We selected a purposive sample of racially and ethnically diverse high schools to receive the treatment and matched them with high schools that would not receive the treatment. Parents of students in the treatment schools were recruited for MSEP workshops. Higher level math and science enrollments were to be compared in the three high schools where parents were eligible to attend workshops with enrollments in matched high schools where no parents attended workshops. During MSEP's first phase, our core activity was the HOME workshops.

We hypothesized that attending HOME workshops would have a positive effect on reducing the race gap in upper-level math and science courses. After two years of HOME workshops, we anticipated that the Black-White gap in higher-level math and science enrollment would narrow more sharply in our treatment communities' high schools than in our control communities.

HOME began six workshop series.⁷ Three workshops series were successfully implemented. Three series did not have enough participants to make conducting them worthwhile in terms of the goals and resources of the project, and after one or two initial sessions, the workshops were cancelled.

This article presents and analyzes qualitative data collected from the initial phase of the project when we attempted to recruit parents to workshops and to develop authentic ties to members of the community. We collected qualitative and descriptive data (formative and summative) pertaining to the development of, recruitment for, and implementation of HOME workshops. Members of the research and workshop teams kept an ongoing field journal, took field notes on recruitment and outreach activities, and took ethnographic notes during workshops. These data were logged in a central database. Additionally, parent participants provided brief descriptive feedback about their workshop experiences through pre- and post-test surveys at each session. MSEP team members conducted follow-up interviews with parent graduates of HOME.

In the next section we present and analyze two vignettes that capture the workings of historical and contemporary forces that influenced our attempts at community collaboration. The vignettes convey the complicated nature of the interpersonal identity processes that emerged during the MSEP team's efforts to create a collaborative relationship with various community organizations and to recruit parents. The vignettes are at once fascinating, disturbing, and instructive regarding the possibilities, challenges, and contradictions of this kind of community-based action research for educational change.

Findings: MSEP Reaches Out to a Distrustful Community

Even with a reasonable conceptual foundation in place, and with many successes of other programs to guide and encourage us, doing the work of community collaboration for MSEP was fraught with challenges. Collaborative notions, such as "letting the people decide" (Fisher, 1994), are always easier in theory than practice. Indeed, before the people can decide, they must be at the table, so to speak. In bringing community stakeholders to the table to plan HOME workshops, the MSEP team experienced identity issues of power and trust. These initial experiences foreshadowed those that MSEP faced throughout the entire three-year process during which the six HOME workshops and four Teen Summits were implemented with varying degrees of success (for a detailed discussion of the full MSEP experience, see Mickelson, Cousins, & Williams, in preparation).

The list of stakeholders and related actors/institutions we worked with over a 16-month period included members of both the private and public sectors, people from large organizations (the school system) as well as local grass roots organizations, Black churches, community grocery stores, and parents. Importantly, there were many instances of cooperation and convergence between stakeholders and MSEP team members in this collaborative work.

These collaborations taught MSEP a great deal about community attitudes and norms, and eventually our efforts increased MSEP's access to the target parents. Nonetheless, social and political strain and tension marked a significant proportion of the interpersonal interactions between MSEP team members and several community organizations and their representatives.

A key challenge arose from MSEP's base at UNCC – a predominantly White university that signifies to many African Americans a history of exclusion and exploitation.⁸ The university affiliation also triggered anxieties about class differences among formally educated MSEP personnel and less educated community members (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Perhaps the most critical challenge was rooted in the inclusion of White individuals in MSEP's leadership. Several community collaborators expressed tensions related to these issues. On the whole, individuals who led or were members of the organizations with which we worked – most/all of whom were African American – came from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the personal interests, motivations, and identity processes of these individuals – influenced at least in part by their social class status and the historical and contemporary contexts of life in their communities, neighborhoods, and schools – appeared to conflict with MSEP's processes and administrative leadership.

We support these claims with vignettes from the field notes of two MSEP team graduate assistants assigned to community outreach. Their responsibilities were to recruit parents for the workshops and community stakeholders for participation in MSEP. The following vignettes cover the work of two African American, male graduate students.⁹ The first of two vignettes – all taken from MSEP team members' journals of their interactions with community members – highlights tensions around race and social class identities as they played out in issues of community-school-university power, status, and trust. The racial tension in this vignette centers on the fact that the target communities are Black and some of the MSEP professional staff are White. The social class tensions reflect the hidden injuries suffered by those who do not have formal education and the power and access typically afforded to those who have education.

Vignette 1: Recruiting a School Amidst Racial Tensions and Distrust

Anthony Dotson participated in a meeting at Marshall Middle School. He was invited to attend in order to meet with the principal and the math coordinator. The invitation came from Mr. Taylor, an influential community member who served as a school truancy officer. Having had previous contact and conversations with Mr. Taylor, Dotson was guarded. He felt the need to protect the image of MSEP, because Mr. Taylor questioned UNCC's motive for engaging

in research activities with the African American community and, more specifically, with the West Boulevard Corridor (a moderate to low income and predominantly African American section of Charlotte).

Below are Dotson's notes from this meeting:

Dr. Terry Smith (Principal), Mr. Tom Jackson (Math Coordinator), Jerri Ward (Family Involvement Coordinator), Beverly Tims (Coordinator of Volunteers and Partnerships), and Mr. Taylor sat at the table with me on November 4, 2003 at 9 a.m. Everyone at the table was African American. There were multiple purposes for the meeting: (1) to develop a relationship with a middle school that will feed future students into the targeted high schools identified in the research proposal; (2) to propose collaboration with the middle school to identify parents that meet research proposal requirements; and (3) to invite Mr. Jackson to attend or become an instructor for future HOME workshops.

Mr. Taylor took the lead in having everyone introduce himself or herself. He then offered a brief introduction of the MSEP project from his understanding. I followed him with a more concise description of the project. I then identified community leaders, human service agencies, and churches that our project had reached out to and was currently working with to meet the goals of MSEP. Questions were frequently raised during my presentation regarding the following: the integrity of MSEP's intentions to "help" Black people; MSEP's similarity to CMS's AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program; a focus only on "students with the ability to achieve;" exclusion of elementary school students and parents; UNCC faculty being disconnected from the experiences of the African American communities participating in the project.

The above concerns are emblematic of traditional and emergent tensions in university-community relations. But within the meeting, tension seemed to also rest with the fact that a CMS official had spoken to Mr. Taylor about past hostile relations between school officials and one of the co-directors of MSEP, who is White. Although Dotson was forthright that he could only offer speculative insight into those issues, he chose instead to remind the group that the MSEP leaders had met with CMS's superintendent and had been granted support and permission to obtain technical support from the school system. This response seemed to calm fears and other apprehensions as the principal, Dr. Smith, began to make suggestions as to how her school administration and staff could assist with identifying potential parents to attend the community workshops.

Indeed, CMS's tendency to exercise tight control over the public comments of school officials seemed to be an effort to curb external criticism that the school system was still racist, insensitive to the interests of poor children of color, and its schools racially and socioeconomically unbalanced. Dotson's observations continue:

Everyone in the meeting had come to an agreement that this project had the potential to be very beneficial to many families. However, some of them still seemed to have concerns. I began to feel that the question everyone wanted to ask, but was apprehensive about asking, was about the racial composition of the HOME team (several graduate assistants, researchers, and the co-director are White).¹⁰ I spoke afterwards to some of the meeting participants, and my impressions were confirmed as I answered a series of questions: (1) Who will be speaking to the parents? (2) Who will be documenting or collecting the data? (3) How will this data benefit the university? (4) How will the project benefit the UNCC faculty?

These questions provided a snapshot of the interests of several African American professionals who believed they represented the interests of the African American community. They had concerns about social class issues among African Americans, between African Americans and non-African Americans, and about protecting the African American community by not supporting a project that could possibly harm and exploit African American people. Dotson also sensed that had the CMS superintendent – an African American male – not supported HOME, the tone and conversation would have been one in which the project would not be invited to collaborate with the middle school in question. Nonetheless, Dr. Smith asked that MSEP collaborate with a math program she had in place at the school. She spoke enthusiastically about the possibility of the MSEP team working with parents at the same time that their children were being provided math instruction. A small victory.

Throughout the meeting Dotson was unsure of who truly supported MSEP. He felt he had to prove both his commitment to the African American community and his sensitivity to the historical mistreatment of the community by mainstream White institutions and their representatives, especially researchers. To appease their concerns, he felt that he had to provide personal, first hand experiences through his identity as an African American. He told them about his interactions in the targeted communities and his attempts to develop a relationship with parents. He shared with them statements made by community leaders regarding community involvement in another UNCC research effort. He provided a timeline that detailed the steps he followed to establish a mutually respectful relationship between UNCC, CMS, the community,

and parents. Fortunately, this seemed to authenticate Dotson's presence at the table of community gatekeepers and comforted those individuals who raised concerns about previous problematic relationships between UNCC faculty members and CMS.

In sum, Anthony Dotson's experiences document the highly interpersonal and racially charged nature of community collaboration. They document the fragile nature of these relations and what was, in our case, a persistent racial strain in community-university collaborations and, consequently, in community- MSEP relations. However, it was through dialogue – *a dialogic context* – that Dotson and the others attempted to resolve the tension and build solidarity. In addition to Dotson's own personal agency as an African American and an insightful and skilled community worker, we believe that interpersonal proximity – in this case, person-to-person, face-to-face interactions – aided his perception of the need to address and establish the social and political legitimacy of MSEP and its HOME workshops.

Vignette 2: Establishing Program Legitimacy Despite Racial (and Class) Mistrust and Suspicion

In a slightly different vein, Sean Langley also experienced what he perceived to be racially tinged social and political strain regarding the legitimacy of MSEP and HOME workshops. Although he encountered similar responses to his recruitment efforts, Langley believed what he experienced resulted largely from the fact that MSEP and HOME workshops were co-led by a White professional and were selective regarding its target population and schools.

In one instance, Langley was accompanied by the White PI to a HOME recruitment meeting at an African American Baptist church located in the neighborhood of one of the target schools. The audience included approximately eight parents, twenty children between the ages of 5 and 17, and a panel of two teachers, one counselor, and one principal. The educators were members of the church. Sean Langley addressed the group while the White PI sat among parents in the audience.

Sean Langley began the session by first distributing HOME brochures to each parent. He told the audience about the workshop and how HOME is trying to close the race gap in education by pushing more African American kids into higher-level math and science courses. He explained how we were specifically targeting African American parents whose children attended HOME's three target high schools and the middle schools that feed these high schools. He soon discovered that none of the parents' children attended HOME's target schools.¹¹ Consequently, he asked these parents to discuss the workshops with parents whose children attended the target schools. Langley went on to explain

the workshop content, hands-on math and science activities, social support activities for children, and the like. He ended by asking if there were questions. This is Langley's record of the following interaction:

Questions began with members of the panel and were directed to Dr. Mickelson, the project co-director. She was asked about the term "academically able" and the project's limited focus on three high schools and their feeder middle schools rather than elementary schools and other high schools [not included in the design but where *her* children attended].

During this interaction, Sean Langley observed, in the audience, what appeared to be discomfort, skepticism, and at times agitation based on the fact that a White researcher was working on Black issues in a Black community, and what appeared to be beliefs by some audience members that the White researcher was naïve about schooling and the tracking of Black students. Consider this example:

One audience member, with a bit of agitation in her voice, asked Dr. Mickelson "Why aren't you focusing on elementary schools, because that's where the foundation is set for students! After Dr. Mickelson responded, an elementary school principal raised a similar point and said "...there are many African American students with high grades and end of grade test scores at my school."

The principal's tone was such that Dr. Mickelson responded by highlighting the fact that the other co-director's sons attend the school in question, in an effort to convey to the educator and the audience that the co-director is an African American professor at UNCC. None of this seemed to resonate with the panel or audience. Dr. Mickelson still stood out as a White researcher studying Black children and for all the history that conjures. Nevertheless, at the end of the meeting two women on the panel said they enjoyed the session. One said, "I loved the information you presented." Another small victory.

Anthony Dotson and Sean Langley had experiences similar to other research assistants on our community outreach team. Based on our collective experiences as educators, sociologists, social workers, and anthropologists, most of these issues were not new. However, they did, we believe, take the form we encountered due to the characteristics of our project in interaction with the particular historical and contemporary contexts of life in the Charlotte community (Douglas, 1995; Mickelson, 2001; Smith, 2004). Eventually, we obtained enough support and involvement from local organizations and CMS – our most effective source – to recruit parents for several workshops, although never in sufficient numbers to generate a critical mass of African American students in the higher level courses offered in the treatment site high schools.

In sum, the importance of these vignettes is their candid examination of the racial (and class, to a lesser extent) mistrust in these Charlotte communities. Whether that mistrust was a consequence of the recent desegregation trial, the class tensions between the working and middle class residents of the community and highly educated university representatives, contemporary racial politics, or other factors remains unclear. That these tensions affected HOME workshops' efficacy and scope is unambiguous.

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

"Community organizing...is shaped by a complex interaction between human agency and the wider social, political, and economic context" in which it takes place (Fisher & Shragge, 2000, p. 1). In a general sense, we have found this to be true. This quote in some ways prepared us to face the fact that many community stakeholders would be quite ambivalent, if not hostile, about MSEP despite the fact that purpose of the HOME workshops was consistent with community goals, their content was culturally sensitive, and the MSEP team was diverse. The community's ambivalence and hostility make sense given the brief history of MSEP in the Charlotte community and the social, economic, and political contexts that mark race relations in Charlotte.¹² There are some lessons and important implications in these experiences.

First, a key part of the complexity of community work is related to identity issues, the dialogic relations within them, and the historical and contemporary contexts that color the meaning of life (Appiah, 1994; Cousins, 2008; Fordham, 1996; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Taylor, 1994). We have learned that the community members with whom we interacted have had a collective experience as racial, social, and economic groups and as members of one or more organizations. Yet each of them has, like all of us, personal/individual motivations and interests. We cannot highlight one over the other – the collective over the personal/individual or vice versa. Common racial identity does not remove the sort of basic give-and-take of interpersonal exchanges, nor the barriers that get between people who want something from one another but do not know or trust one another. Identity is a psychohistorical formation (Holland et al., 1998); trust, familiarity, and reciprocity remain basic to it in human relations in community work and beyond. Consequently, if an organization is to achieve a successful collaborative partnership with a community, and if it has to counterbalance the ill effects generated by similar organizations in a community's past, it may have to spend time in a community to establish a collective memory of trust and commitment.

Specifically, Anthony Dotson stood face-to-face with individuals who questioned not only the project, but also Dotson's very authenticity as an African

American. Authenticity here means an unequivocal commitment to the Black community's causes, issues, and points of view. Sean Langley faced the prospect of having to justify the legitimacy of MSEP as unbiased because it has a White co-director and White research assistants and because workshops focused on "academically able" students, perceived as a coded way of talking about ability and intelligence – both very sensitive issues in African American communities. Both Dotson's and Langley's experiences occurred in an environment in which the representatives of communities and organizations sought to protect organizational and community interests. But they added to this their own individual interests based on their personal reference group (defined by race/ethnicity and social class) and their private motivations. This played out in differing degrees for Dotson and Langley when the African American community members and organizational leaders questioned the who, what, and why of the MSEP research and its researchers. Both Dotson and Langley faced situations in which a narrative about inequality and racial subjugation, driven by cultural models, influenced actions at multiple social and interpersonal levels (Appiah, 1994; Bruner, 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Taylor, 1994).

Finally, notwithstanding the relationship complexities described above, it is especially noteworthy that much of the resistance and distrust regarding MSEP did not come from the African American parents to whom we reached out, but rather from some Whites in the CMS bureaucracy and African Americans who held leadership roles in CMS and in their communities (we discuss this at length in Mickelson, Cousins, Williams, & Velasco, *in press*). This yet again raises questions about personal motivations and the influence of class and race tensions in university-community collaborations. Some of the leaders in question are middle class educators. Some are community/neighborhood organization leaders who are neither college educated nor from middle class backgrounds. Others are political activists with a mix of backgrounds. Outsider-insider relations in general are always complex and must be accounted for in community collaborations (Brodsky et al., 2004; Miller, 2004). We knew to expect as much, but the extent to which racial politics have played a role across different social, economic, and political domains in the Charlotte community has been striking even to our seasoned sensibilities.¹³

The implications of the above lessons begin with the need to understand that perhaps our experiences with MSEP speak to the wisdom, if not the practical necessity, of embedding projects such as ours within existing community programs. Another side of the same coin would be to work with individuals who have the requisite community clout and sanctioning to move a program beyond the obstacles we encountered. Community programs and individuals that have community legitimacy, acceptance, and support have largely done

the bottom-up work we have been doing and have resolved many of the issues we faced. And although they are not ever out of the choppy waters of university-community (and school-family-community) collaboration, established and successful community programs are able to deliver some semblance of the project they originally envisioned in a way that is relatively inclusive of community interests.

Second, work such as ours must include parents and other collaborators in a review of the data as it is collected and in the identification of problems and solutions. We took it for granted that this would occur in MSEP because we had met often with our Community Advisory Council to discuss and review issues and strategies. Nevertheless, we now believe that we should have been more vigilant in having them share responsibility for the problems encountered and in developing solutions.

Third, there is an entirely different implication that we do not want to overlook, although we do not fully understand it at this moment and it is too early to measure. It is the role of consciousness-raising we believe our project may have inadvertently ignited among the parents, educators, and community leaders with whom we interacted over the course of MSEP's three-year history. Discussions about MSEP and HOME recruitment presentations to various individuals and groups throughout Charlotte, and the outcomes we have begun to analyze for those parents who completed workshops, may work to raise awareness of the educational issues we ultimately sought to address.

In conclusion, despite the challenges and difficulties we faced, the findings from the implementation of MSEP's HOME workshops include the fact that the overwhelming majority of parents who participated in our workshops expressed gratitude regarding the helpful things they learned. For example, on a consistent basis during and after our workshops, parents spoke positively about learning their legal rights, developing knowledge and strategies that help them participate successfully in the school system, learning strategies to navigate relationships with their children, building networks both to maintain their successes as parents and to spread them to neighbors and friends, and regarding the gratification of being "heard" (we discuss these outcomes at length in Mickelson, Cousins, Williams, & Velasco, in press).

On the one hand, the parents who participated in HOME workshops were pleased and wanted others to share the same positive experience.¹⁴ On the other hand, getting people into the workshops through community collaboration was a daunting challenge. Ultimately, we learned that projects like the Math/Science Equity Program must become the property of one or more grassroots community organizations in large, race- and class-embattled communities. MSEP never was able to do this within the time constraints of our

funding period. We believe a key reason we were never able to meet this challenge relates to the racial and class tensions rooted in MSEP's association with a university and the high profile role of White researcher-activists associated with it.

Yet, rather than despairing at the challenges of these dynamics, we as collaborators must be prepared to embrace the complexity of individual and collective identity in university-community (and school-family-community) collaborations. The challenges they pose increase our knowledge and improve our lives. After all, as Moses and Cobb say, "That is what we do" (2001, p. xiv).

Endnotes

¹We do not describe the complete project and its outcomes (see Mickelson, Cousins, Williams, & Velasco, in press, for these details). Instead we focus on our attempts at collaborative activities that occurred during an 18-month period in which we implemented the first phase of MSEP – our parental workshops.

²Our description of CMS focuses on the years 2002-2005 during which MSEP was implemented.

³Members of the CAC advised MSEP on the scope, design, and implementation of HOME workshops. The CAC consisted of parents, community activists, social workers, public school educators, business owners, and the like.

⁴MSEP's second phase was a program called Teen Summit, day-long seminars that offered a streamlined version of HOME's six workshops. MSEP's third and final phase was PEP (Parents Empowering Parents), a short-lived autonomous community group that was intended to carry on MSEP's work once the university-collaboration ended.

⁵As early as the 1840s, so called "African" grammar schools – discovered to be unhealthy and inadequate – were the focus of collaborative reform efforts among Boston's small Black population and White abolitionists (Formisano, 1991, p. 23). The NAACP helped African Americans in Boston fight for access and fairness in public education in the 1930s, more than a decade before the landmark *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision in 1954 (Formisano, p. 27).

⁶For additional discussions of community organizing and education in communities of color and related issues see Ball (1995), Castelloe, Watson, & White (2002), Cox (2001), Grossman & Gumz (2003), Gutierrez (1997), Hilliard (1989), O'Donnell, Michalak, & Ames (1998); and Perry & Delpit (1998).

⁷A HOME workshop series contains six weekly sessions that lasted 2.5 hours each. After the last unsuccessful workshop was cancelled, MSEP switched formats to one- and two-day long Teen Summits. Teen Summits presented abbreviated versions of the materials presented in the six HOME workshop sessions. MSEP offered four Teen Summits.

⁸We note this perception persists even though UNC-Charlotte is increasingly seen as a friendly place for African Americans: 25% of undergraduates are African Americans; this is a higher percentage than in any other historically White University of North Carolina campus.

⁹Although actual names are used for MSEP team members, pseudonyms are used for the names of schools, organizations, and citizens in this article.

¹⁰In fact, Dotson reported in a MSEP team meeting that several community representatives raised the possibility with him that the African American Co-PI and the African American workshop director were public relations fronts for the White PI who held the real reins of power.

¹¹This instance highlights one of the recruitment complications MSEP encountered. Although a given church was part of a treatment school's community, the church's membership often came from throughout the county. This meant that some of the parents were qualified for HOME workshops while others were not. The fine points of experimental design were not well-received by parents who wanted to participate in HOME workshops but could not because of the schools their children attended. We address the ethical and practical dilemmas of adhering to our quasi-experimental design in a forthcoming manuscript (Mickelson, Cousins, & Williams, in preparation).

¹²Indeed, a second luncheon sponsored by MSEP with community leaders confirmed that MSEP had generated status and respect by merely surviving for two years.

¹³See Mickelson, Cousins, Williams, & Velasco (in press) for a discussion of the extent to which MSEP overcame these obstacles and difficulties.

¹⁴Earlier we summarize our data collection process, which included pre- and post-tests at each session to document parents' perception of their experiences with MSEP/HOME workshops.

References

- Anyon, Y., & Fernandez, M. A. (2007, Nov/Dec). Realizing the potential of community-university partnerships. *Change*, 40-45.
- Appiah, K. A. (1994). Identity, authenticity, and survival: Multicultural societies and social reproduction. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 149-164). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ball, A. F. (1995). Community-based learning in urban settings as a model for educational reform. *Applied Behavioral Science Review*, 3(2), 127-146.
- Brodsky, A., Senuta, K., Weiss, C., Marx, C., Loomis, C., Arteaga, S., et al. (2004). When one plus one equals three: The role of relationships and context in community research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3/4), 229-241.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Caine, K. J., Salomons, M., & Simmons, D. (2007). Partnerships for social change in the Canadian North: Revisiting the insider-outsider dialectic. *Development and Change*, 38(3), 447-472.
- Castelloe, P., Watson, T., & White, C. (2002). Participatory change: An integrative approach to community practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 10(4), 7-31.
- Cousins, L. (2008). Black students identity and acting white and black. In J. Ogbu (Ed.), *Minority status, oppositional culture, and schooling* (pp. 167-189). New York: Routledge.
- Cousins, L., Williams, L., & Battani, P. (Eds.). (1998). Families and neighborhoods, community and university partnerships [Theme issue]. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 25(1), 61-153.
- Cox, E. (2001). Community practice issues in the 21st century: Questions and challenges for empowerment-oriented practitioners. *Journal of Community Practice*, 9(1), 37-55.
- Douglas, D. (1995). *Reading, writing, and race: Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Dryfoos, J. (1994). *Full-service schools: A revolution in health and social services for children, youth, and families*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Epstein, J., Collins, K., Bailey-Burch, B., Walker-Thoth, D., & Pancella, T. (2007). Space scouts: A collaboration between university researchers and African American churches. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, 6(1), 31-44.

- Epstein, J. (1995, May). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 701-712.
- Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Ewalt, P., Freeman, E., & Poole, D. (Eds.). (1998). *Community building: Renewal, well-being, and shared responsibility*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Fisher, R. (1994). *Let the people decide: Neighborhood organizing in America*. New York: Twayne.
- Fisher, R., & Karger, H. (1997). *Social work and community in a private world: Getting out in public*. New York: Longman.
- Fisher, R., & Shragge, E. (2000). Challenging community organizing: Facing the 21st century. *Journal of Community Practice*, 8(3), 1-19.
- Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Formisano, R. (1991). *Boston against busing: Race, class, and ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Foster-Fishman, P. G., Berkowitz, S., Lounsbury, D., Jacobson, S., & Allen, N. (2001). Building collaborative capacity in community coalitions: A review and integrative framework. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(2), 241-262.
- Gold, K. M. (2006). "We just don't want to keep on going to useless meetings:" Community organizing at Detroit's Jefferson Junior High School, 1966-1967. *Michigan Historical Review*, 32(1), 97-121.
- Grossman, S., & Gumz, E. (2003). Majority-based neighborhood organizing and its role in contemporary community practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 11(2), 47-65.
- Gutierrez, L. (1997). Multicultural community organizing. In M. Reisch & E. Gambrill (Eds.), *Social work in the 21st century* (pp. 249-259). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Harkavy, I. (2006). The role of universities in advancing citizenship and social justice in the 21st Century. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 1(1), 5-37.
- Harper, G., Bangi A., Contreras, R., Pedraza, A., Tolliver, M., & Vess, L. (2004). Diverse phases of collaboration: Working together to improve community-based HIV interventions for adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3/4), 193-204.
- Hilliard, A. (1989). Reintegration for education: Community involvement with students in schools. In W. Smith & E. Chunn (Eds.), *Black education: A quest for equity and excellence* (pp. 201-208). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Holland, D., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, Jr., W., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Institute for Community Research. (2004). *Crossroads: Critical issues in community-based research partnerships*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- McKnight, J. (1995). *The careless society: Community and its counterfeits*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mickelson, R. (2001). Subverting Swann: First- and second-generation segregation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 1-38.
- Mickelson, R. (2003). The academic consequences of desegregation and segregation: Evidence from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. *North Carolina Law Review*, 81(4), 120-165.
- Mickelson, R., Cousins, L., Williams, B., & Velasco, A. (in press). Taking math and science to black parents: Promises and challenges of a community-based intervention for educational change. In C. Yeakey & W. Tate (Eds.), *The power of place: Neighborhoods, schools and social inequality*. Oxford, England: Elsevier.

- Mickelson, R. A., Velasco, A. E., Maples, S. C., & Greene, A. (2002, April 5). *How race and class shape parental involvement in the high school course selection process*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Mickelson, R., & Southworth, S. (2005). When opting-out is not a choice: Implications for NCLB from Charlotte, North Carolina. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 38, 1-15.
- Mickelson, R. A., & Velasco, A. E. (2006). Bring it on: Diverse responses to “acting White” among academically able African Americans. In McNamara Horvat, E., & O’Connor, C. (Eds.), *Beyond acting White: Reassessments and new directions in research on Black students and school success*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Miller, K. (2004). Beyond the frontstage: Trust, access, and the relational context in research with refugee communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(3/4), 217-227.
- Moses, R., & Cobb, C. (2001). *Radical equations: Math literacy and civil rights*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- National Clearing House for Comprehensive School Reform. (2003). *Involving parents and communities in CSR*. Washington, DC: Author.
- O’ Connor, C. (2001). Making sense of the complexity of social identity in relation to achievement: A sociological challenge in the new millennium [Extra issue]. *Sociology of Education*, 159-168.
- O’Donnell, J., Michalak, E., & Ames, E. (1998). Inner-city youths helping children: After school programs to promote bonding and reduce risk. In P. Ewalt, E. Freeman, & D. Poole (Eds.), *Community building: Renewal, well-being, and shared responsibility* (pp. 191-201). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Ogbu, J. (2003). *American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ogbu, J., & Simons, H. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural-ecological theory of school performance and some implications for education. *Anthropology of Education Quarterly*, 29, 155-188.
- Perry, T., & Delpit, L. (Eds.). (1998). *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. (2003). *Young, gifted, and black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rivera, F., & Erlich, J. (1995). *Community organizing in a diverse society*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class*. New York: Knopf.
- Smith, S. (2004). *Boom for whom?: Education, desegregation, and development in Charlotte*. Albany: Statue University of New York Press.
- Smith, S., & Mickelson, R. (2000). All that glitters is not gold: School reform in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22, 101-127.
- Southworth, S., & Mickelson, R. (2007) The interactive effects of race, gender, and high school racial composition on college track placement. *Social Forces*, 82(2), 497-523.
- Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Hellwig, M., Kouba, J., Redmond, L., Martinez, L., Block, D., et al. (2006). The making of an interdisciplinary partnership: The case of the Chicago food system collaborative. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(1-2), 113-123.
- Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. No. 281. 431 F.2d 138 (August 7, 1971).
- Taylor, C. (1994). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 25-74). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2007). *Closing the achievement gap – School, community, family connections*. Baltimore, MD: Author.
- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2000, April 1). *Census 2000: The population of North Carolina*. Washington, DC: Author.

Linwood H. Cousins, associate professor of social work at Longwood University, is a social worker and anthropologist who studies culture, race, and social class among African Americans and in the context of African American participation education and other mainstream institutions. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Linwood H. Cousins, Department of Social Work & Communication Sciences Disorders, Longwood University, 201 High Street, Farmville, VA, 23901; or cousinslh@longwood.edu

Roslyn Arlin Mickelson is professor of sociology and adjunct professor of public policy, urban education, information technology, and women's studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She has published widely on minority achievement, the political economy of education, and the effects of school and classroom composition on educational outcomes.

Brian Williams is an assistant professor of science education at Georgia State University in Atlanta. His scholarly pursuits focus on the intersection of science education, urban education, and multicultural education. Specifically, he is interested in the ways in which issues related to race, ethnicity, culture, and class influence teaching and learning in science classrooms. Most recently, Dr. Williams coordinated the Math/Science Equity Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The program examined the link between parental involvement and the tracking of African American students in science. In addition to his research, Dr. Williams has over 14 years of experience working with teachers and students in science education. He has taught science methods and content courses to K-12 teachers in the United States and Africa.

Anne E. Velasco, MSEP's project manager, is currently coordinating a women's health outreach program in Union County, North Carolina. Her research interests include gender, race, and education.

Acknowledgements

We thank the SCJ reviewers for their thoughtful and rigorous comments on various drafts of this article. We also thank the editor of the SCJ for her insights and direction. Finally, we thank the research assistants who made the work of the MSEP possible. In particular, we acknowledge the contributions to this article of Anthony Dotson, Sean Langley, and Candace Payne-Butler. This research was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Facilitating Family Involvement and Support for Inclusive Education

Yaoying Xu and John Filler

Abstract

The advantages to a family-centered approach to services have been emphasized in education literature for several decades. Active family involvement and support have been identified as key elements to the success of inclusive early childhood education programs. The purpose of this article is two-fold: to review literature on family involvement in inclusive early childhood programs from the perspective of developmental ecological systems theory, and to describe family-focused programs for developing embedded learning opportunities across multiple inclusive settings. In so doing, we discuss how the four components of the ecological system (the microsystem, parents and siblings; the mesosystem, peers and school; the exosystem, community connections; and the macrosystem, cultural identity) influence the education of the child.

Key words: family involvement, inclusion, ecological systems, parents, siblings, early childhood education, Asian, case, cultural diversity

Introduction

Active family involvement has long been considered to be an important factor related to better outcomes in the education of young children with and without disabilities in inclusive early childhood programs (Berger, 1995; Levy, Kim, & Olive, 2006; Pérez Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Research has shown that high levels of parental involvement correlate with improved academic performance, higher test scores, more positive attitudes toward school,

higher homework completion rates, fewer placements in special education, academic perseverance, lower dropout rates, and fewer suspensions (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pérez Carreón, et al.).

Parental involvement is important for the education of children of all ages, but it is critical for the success of young children in inclusive settings (Filler & Xu, 2006). Although there has not been a standard definition of the term *inclusion*, inclusive early childhood programming typically reflects three characteristics: (1) full participation of children with disabilities in everyday life activities with their typically developing peers in both school and community settings; (2) educational goals and objectives are developed and implemented through team collaboration by parents and professionals; and (3) child outcomes are measured periodically to ensure the effectiveness of the program (Guralnick, 2001; Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, & Bae, 2004; Odom et al., 1996; Siegel, 1996).

The recognition that family involvement benefits children does not make clear how the involvement becomes a positive force or what factors act to determine the degree of benefit. Family involvement is not a fixed event but a dynamic and ever-changing series of interactions that vary depending on the context in which they occur, the disciplines from which the collaborative team members are drawn, the resources parents bring to the interactions, and the particular needs of the child and the family. Traditionally, the education agency or school has created structures and activities intended to support involvement. However, as parents become involved, they do so with limited power to define their roles and actions (Fine, 1993). They are often expected to agree with and support the structures and dynamics already in place. Parents who agree with the school and get along with the existing model are seen as “good.” Those who disagree are considered “problematic” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Parent involvement is also related to teacher actions. For example, Anderson and Minke (2007) found that specific teacher invitations were significantly related to parent involvement behaviors, particularly among minority and low-income families. They suggested that when parents perceived that their participation was desired by teachers, they would often overcome obstacles to be involved in spite of a lack of resources. Brown and Medway (2007) examined the relationships among measures of school climate, teacher expectations, and instructional practices in an elementary school with a high percentage of low-income, minority children. They found that when teachers valued parental input and family involvement, they created ways to facilitate home-school communication. Exemplary teachers also felt responsible for building a positive relationship with parents and placed a high value on parents helping their

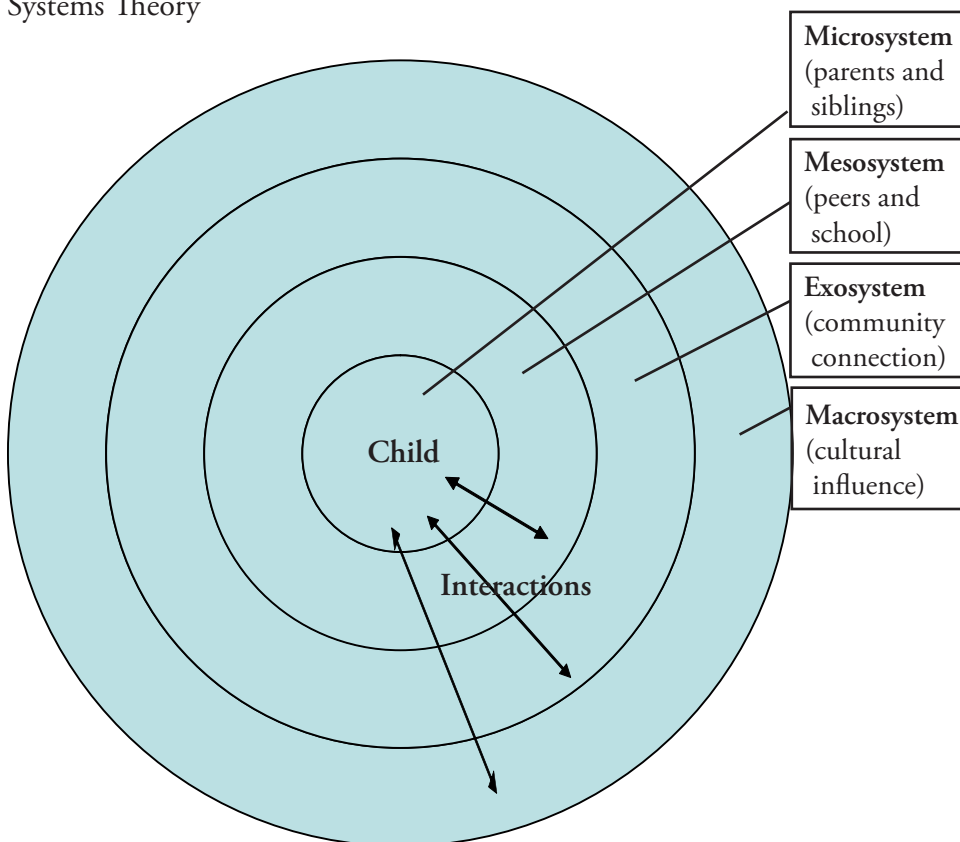
children with homework and other activities. These teachers viewed parent involvement as more than physical presence at school and felt that parents could make a significant educational impact beyond what they may contribute by attending meetings and volunteering in the classroom.

The purpose of this article is two-fold: to review literature on family involvement in inclusive early childhood programs from the perspective of developmental ecological systems theory, and to describe family-focused programs for developing embedded learning opportunities across multiple inclusive settings. We begin the review with a discussion of four ecological systems that are critical to an understanding of factors that may influence the degree and form of participation and then go on to describe a slightly different but complementary approach that views the child as embedded in a series of interrelated systems that interact with one another.

The Theoretical Framework: Developmental Ecological Systems Approach

The ecological systems model we are focusing upon is based on an approach first described by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1988, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner, an ecological systems model views the child as existing within a complex ecological context consisting of numerous intrafamilial and extrafamilial systems that affect children's development. Specifically, there are four interconnected systems that comprise the model (see Figure 1). The first is the microsystem and consists of the immediate family environment or setting in which the child lives, such as parent and sibling interactions that exert an impact on the child. The mesosystem refers to interconnections between two or more settings or the interactions outside the family environment such as school and peer influences. The exosystem is the community context that may not be directly experienced by the child, but which may influence the elements of the microsystem, such as sibling interactions. The macrosystem is the wider social, cultural, and legal context that encompasses all the other systems. An ecological systems view of inclusive education suggests that children with or without disabilities develop in a complex social world and that it is necessary to observe interactions at multilevel contexts and examine changes over time at all levels. To ensure the success of inclusive educational programming, it is critical to integrate individual and contextual processes and to examine interrelations among these systems. As shown in Figure 1, among the multiple levels of influence within the global system, the child's development is most directly affected by the immediate family environment that provides a connection between the child and the outside world.

Figure 1. The Interacted Systems Model Based on Developmental Ecological Systems Theory



Embedded Learning Opportunities

Developmental ecological systems psychologists describe the child as embedded in a series of interrelated systems that interact with one another (McCormick, 2006). The interaction is bi-directional, that is, the developing child both affects and is affected by nested systems. According to the theory, the child's learning occurs within the context of normally occurring routines in familiar settings. For a child with disabilities, these settings refer to the general education environment or any natural setting where typically developing children are present. Therefore, an understanding of the needs of the child with disabilities must be accompanied by a careful analysis of the opportunities that exist in the typical educational setting to address the goals and objectives designed to alleviate those needs. In essence, the schedule of events that comprise the general education curriculum, including the content, format, and length of various learning activities, should be considered relative to target skills or objectives.

The planning for children with disabilities should start with a team discussion of the general education curriculum and should focus on routine and planned activities. One evidence-based approach for this planning would be to develop embedded learning opportunities that are identified by general education teachers, special education teachers, parents, and other individuals who routinely interact with the child. Embedded learning opportunities are short teaching episodes that focus on individual learning objectives and are infused within ongoing classroom activities and routines (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). The development of an activity matrix is one strategy for implementing embedded learning opportunities (Filler & Xu, 2006; Fox & Williams, 1991; Sandall & Schwartz). Typically the activity matrix includes a simple schedule of the daily activities for the early childhood program setting in which a child with disabilities is to be fully included throughout the day. In this schedule, the instructional goals for the target child are taken directly from the child's individualized family services plan (IFSP) or the individualized education program (IEP). Families' priorities for instruction are considered. Parents and other family members' perspectives are viewed as important and numerous carefully planned opportunities are provided to address high priority skills during daily program activities. Including family increases the probability that skills learned at the center or school are also taught and practiced in the home and other natural settings. Activities that are specifically designed for the child with special needs are based on the family's concerns and priorities and, therefore, are more likely to be appropriate within the cultural context of each family.

The Microsystem: Parents and Siblings

Identifying and Addressing Parental Concerns

As Filler and Xu (2006) have noted,

the realities of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-ability student population demand a unique and nontraditional approach characterized by an individualization sensitive to both inter- and intra-group identity. On the one hand the early childhood educator must pay individual attention to developmentally appropriate content and strategy and on the other hand, support each family's membership in a class loosely defined by common values, methods of adornment, and views regarding the role of the family in the formal educational process. (p. 93)

The task is no more apparent than in the inclusion of students with disabilities (Xu, Gelfer, & Filler, 2003). As a group, these youngsters not only reflect the racial and ethnic diversities of their typically developing peers but may also

present an additional aspect of individuality: different, and at times frustrating, learning and/or behavioral problems.

One challenge to the identification of parental concerns is the unique characteristics of each family, especially families with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Each family may perceive their needs differently and thus may seek different resources. Additionally, the family's belief system may also play an important role in how they determine their priorities and use the resources (Bruder, 2000; Noonan & McCormick, 2006). Vignette 1 is an example of how a family's perception of needs and priorities may differ from that of a professional. (Note: All the names in the vignettes are pseudonyms.)

Vignette 1: The Chan Family

Ling-Ling is a 4½-year-old girl with Down syndrome. She has been receiving Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) service provided by the local school system. At the beginning of the year Ling-Ling's ECSE teacher was concerned about her delayed speech-language and fine motor skills and suggested Ling-Ling receive speech-language therapy and physical therapy interventions. These suggestions were reflected in Ling-Ling's individualized education program (IEP) goals. Three months later, however, Ling-Ling's ECSE teacher was frustrated with the finding that Ling-Ling made minimal progress in her speech-language and fine motor skills. She further found out that Ling-Ling's parents did not follow through on Ling-Ling's intervention plan at home, a critical determiner of success. What she did not know was that Ling-Ling's family had other concerns.

Having a child with a disability has a fundamental and lasting impact on Ling-Ling's family. It changes the belief system that the family has held for generations. Buddhism is the religious background of this family, and they strongly believe what they do in this world will determine what they will become in the other world after they die. In addition to the time issue (both Mr. and Mrs. Chan work full-time), which was the more obvious and immediate concern that the family had, there was another concern that the family was not willing or ready to share with other people, especially with the ECSE teacher who was from a different cultural background. Mr. and Mrs. Chan believed that having a child with disabilities was a punishment from the heavens for some wrong doing by themselves or their ancestors. Therefore, the only way to deal with the disability was to work harder and repent. They did not believe that they had the power to change or improve Ling-Ling's condition. They believed they should take care of and protect Ling-Ling, the priority for the family. Thus it was not surprising that they did not implement any additional interventions at home. In this case, what a professional considered a priority was not a priority for the Chan family. In terms of resources, they were more comfortable in seeking extended family support instead of obtaining professional assistance.

Without understanding Ling-Ling's family's needs and priorities that were intimately related to their cultural background, professionals could misinterpret Mr. and Mrs. Chan's behaviors as uncooperative or irresponsible. What they failed to see was the strength or the power of the Chan family: hardworking, caring, and supportive, demonstrated by both immediate and extended family members (e.g., brother, grandparents, and uncles). These strengths reflected family values that could actually exert a positive influence by enriching the cultural awareness of the preschool.

While the importance of identifying family priorities and resources are self-evident, how to identify and access family resources is very individualized and not always obvious. As Dunst, Trivette, Davis, and Cornwell (1988) have examined, how one defines a family concern or need has much to do with the approach that one uses to address that need. For these authors, a need exists whenever there is a difference between what the parent sees as normative or desirable and what actually exists from his/her perspective, not the perspective of the educator, social worker, or therapist. The role of the professional is to acknowledge and support each family's ability to identify its own concerns relative to the development and education of the child (empowerment) and to assist the family in acquiring both the skills and resources that may be necessary to effectively address those concerns (enablement). According to several studies, many parents do not feel that the activities organized by the school constitute real opportunities for family participation, and many of them actually feel powerless in decision-making processes (e.g., Weiss & Edwards, 1992; Williams & Stallworth, 1984).

More recent research has shown the effects of involving families by empowering and enabling them in the process of decision making within the ecological systems model. A model called "ecologies of parental engagement" (EPE) explains how parents' practices in relation to their children's school can constitute a transformative process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interaction with schools and school activities (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). The term ecology suggests the focus on the entire system: families in relation to environment. Instead of "involvement" to describe the specific things parents do, the researchers used "engagement" to include parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do. In other words, the concept of parental and family involvement goes beyond a given individual and his or her participation in an event. It also includes the contexts involved in an individual's decision to participate in an event, including his or her relationships with other individuals, the history of the event, and the intra-familial resources available that may be utilized to support participation or "engagement." Such an approach

views the family as a complex organization of individuals with unique patterns of communication and responsibilities that at times overlap and at other times are unique to subsystems that exist within the larger family system (e.g., the parent-child subsystem, the spousal subsystem, the sibling subsystem, the parent-grandparent subsystem). An intervention that focuses upon any one individual is likely to affect any subsystem to which that individual belongs which, in turn, affects the entire family.

Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) suggested one way to address family concerns in a meaningful manner for all involved is to allow parents' life experiences and cultural capital to inform and shape the school's culture. Schools need to implement parental participation programs by listening to parents' and other family members' voices and, in so doing, acknowledging the often unique needs and hopes reflected in those voices. In this way the distance between home and school may be reduced and a truly collaborative team could be formed. Cooper and Christie (2005) evaluated a District Parent Training Program (DPTP) which was designed to "educate and empower urban school parents" (p. 2249). Although the DPTP was a curriculum-based parent education program with the intent to empower parents in helping their children in content areas such as English and math, findings from the evaluation by Cooper and Christie suggested a mutual benefit between parents and school. While parents felt more empowered through the program, educators and administrators gained a better understanding of family needs by giving those parents the opportunity to articulate their own needs and pinpoint the ways in which they want to gain from parent-oriented programs. They also found that establishing true partnerships with parents requires that educators acknowledge and validate parents' views and ultimately share power. Partnership also requires educators to show sensitivity to the culturally relevant values that influence parents' educational priorities and demands, and recognize that cultural, socioeconomic, and gender factors affect how parents participate in their children's education. It is important to recognize that implicit in such an approach is the assumption on the part of educators that, as Dunst et al. (1988) have noted, every parent has the capacity to identify his or her own educational concerns and to acquire the skills necessary to play a central role in the education of the child.

Identifying and Meeting Siblings' Needs

Clearly the parent-child subsystem is extremely important within the larger family system, but sibling relationships may be even more significant because siblings actually spend a significant amount of time with each other, and those sibling interactions often directly affect the larger set of peer interactions that occur outside of the family. Siblings learn critical social skills from each other,

such as sharing, negotiation, and competition. The impact of a child's disability on siblings' emotional and behavioral functioning is multifactorial and influenced by characteristics of the sibling and sibling dyad, the nature and demands of the child's condition, and parental and family functioning (Sharpe & Rossiter, 2002; Stoneman & Berman, 1993).

Sibling relationships appear especially important for preschool children. At this age, children start to play associatively or cooperatively, and thus interactive play is one of the effective ways of learning for preschool children. However, due to the disability, this interaction for the child with special needs may be disruptive in two ways: to the child with special needs, and to the child's siblings. Most previous interventions tended to focus on the child with special needs. Yet, the impact on the sibling(s) is equally important. Because of the additional attention and care the child with special needs receives, the siblings might often feel ignored or neglected, or even resentful.

Siblings' needs may be different for families from different cultures. For families with strong sibling relationships, parents may share some of their caregiving responsibilities with the children so that siblings are more likely to feel their roles have particular significance to the family. For families with strong individual values, involving siblings in the planning for the child with special needs may help to develop a sense of identity and recognized value within the entire family system. Regardless of cultural differences, siblings are important role models that can either positively or negatively impact the child with special needs.

Dodd (2004) described the development of a support group for the brothers and sisters of young children with disabilities, Portage "brothers and sisters" project. A model for sibling involvement, the home-based Portage Service provides services for preschool children with a wide range of disabilities and their families. The group offers a mixture of socializing, games, and group-work activities that are intended to address the issues that may emerge in family life when a child with disabilities is born. The Portage model is intended to provide support that is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of siblings as well as those of the child with special needs and their parents.

Effective communication between parents and siblings about disabilities may reduce stress felt by siblings. Pit-Ten Cate and Loots (2000) indicated that siblings reported they worried most often about the future and the health of their brother or sister with disabilities. These siblings commented that open communication and trust were the most important component of their relationship with parents. They acknowledged that it could be difficult for their parents to meet the needs of non-disabled siblings because they might be preoccupied with the child who had additional needs and sometimes might also

wish to protect the other children and conceal information from them. Although parents may fear that talking to a child about a sibling with a disability may induce stress, especially when the child is young, evidence suggests that siblings need information that is appropriate to their age.

Mesosystem: Peers and School

Involving Peers in the Process of Planning for Inclusion

Successful attempts to meet the educational needs of children with a wide spectrum of needs in a single setting require careful planning. Key to that planning is the identification of activities that allow for the meaningful participation of each child and are, at the same time, valid for the unique cultural identity of each family. As families, schools, and communities have taken more steps to fully integrate students with disabilities into the schools, families and educators have worked to find effective ways to plan together. One approach that has been used since the late 1980s is the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS). MAPS is a strategy that was originally developed by Marsha Forest, Jack Pearpoint, Judith Snow, Evelyn Lusthaus, and the staff at the Center for Integrated Education in Canada. One particular characteristic of the MAPS is its focus on what the child can do, instead of the child's weaknesses or deficits (Ryan, Kay, Fitzgerald, Paquette, & Smith, 2001).

A critical feature of the MAPS process is the involvement of typically developing peers and friends of the child with disabilities in planning for inclusion as well as other aspects of the educational program. Typically developing children provide necessary and fresh perspectives on the needs of their peers related to involvement in regular classes and community activities. They also serve a key role in supporting their peer with disabilities in regular activities and settings. Additionally, typically developing peers can help other team members understand and appreciate the dreams and fears of a child with special needs relative to being accepted and valued as a member of the school community. Because the involvement of peers is an essential feature of the MAPS process, the planning should not occur until the child with disabilities has been a member of the regular education or natural community, so that their friends without disabilities can be identified and recruited. Ideally, more than one friend should be included to decrease the likelihood that a child may feel uncomfortable in a predominately or all-adult setting. The planning typically occurs in one or two sessions, but for younger children the session can be broken down into shorter periods. The seven key questions to be addressed by the MAPS include: What is the individual's history? What is your dream for the individual? What is your nightmare? Who is the individual? What are the individual's strengths, gifts,

and abilities? What are the individual's needs? What would the individual's ideal day at school look like, and what must be done to make it happen?

Addressing the questions that compose the MAPS process, however, should be an ongoing activity for the planning team. The facilitator may choose to address the questions in different sequences based on different situations. Peer participation in the planning for inclusion helps the planning team to brainstorm the needs of the child with disabilities, describe the dreams for the child from their typically developing peers' perspectives, share their concerns or fears for the child in inclusive settings, and develop goals that capitalize on the child's strengths within the general education curriculum.

When considering the use of the MAPS process, professionals and parents may ask how the MAPS process relates to the IEP or IFSP development. While the MAPS planning is not a legal process as is the IEP or IFSP procedure, it complements these plans in several ways. First, the collaborative process inherent in the MAPS can lead to a clearer sense of mission and greater sense of teamwork, both of which are keys to early childhood special education and early intervention effectiveness. Second, because the MAPS planning involves the child's siblings and typically developing peers, it provides a source of additional input and perspective that is age and developmentally relevant. Specific IEP goals and objectives and IFSP outcomes should reference skills and concepts taught in general education classes and other typical school and community environments that are chronologically relevant and appropriate (Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989). Third, the MAPS planning should provide families with an experience that leads to an appreciation for the value of their active participation in educational planning.

Vignette 2: What are our dreams for Ling-Ling?

Ling-Ling's MAPS planning team included Ling-Ling's parents, grandparents, and older brother, her preschool friends Sarah and Tom, her ECSE teacher, her speech-language pathologist, and her physical therapist. Everybody was asked to talk about his or her dream for Ling-Ling. What made this planning process unique were the dreams for Ling-Ling expressed by her older brother, Sam, and her friends, Sarah and Tom. Sam was a very caring big brother, and he often played with Ling-Ling after school. His dream for Ling-Ling was that she could go to college; a dream that he shared for himself. Sarah said her dream for Ling-Ling was that they would go to kindergarten together so they could see each other every day and play together. Tom was a very active boy, and he wanted Ling-Ling to play soccer with him. When asked why, he said because they were best friends. Compared with adults' dreams

for Ling-Ling, which were primarily skill-focused, Ling-Ling's friends reminded the adults that Ling-Ling was first of all a 4-year-old child like other same-age children, and therefore she needed to be with her age appropriate peers in natural settings. In order to make this dream come true, an inclusive early childhood program should be considered for her placement. Through this process Mr. and Mrs. Chan were very happy to discover that Ling-Ling was accepted by her typically developing peers as a friend, which they feared would never happen. They never dreamed that Ling-Ling would go to a regular school like her older brother until then. A new horizon was unfolding for Ling-Ling.

As mentioned before, it is widely accepted that family involvement and support is an important factor for the success of inclusive programs (e.g., Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Salend, 2006); however, we cannot assume that family members all understand the value of inclusive practices. The MAPS process provides multiple opportunities for professionals to explain essential features of inclusive programs to families. For example, our experience has suggested that many families initially view special education as a place and not a set of services that are intended to support the successful education of children in the regular educational setting. The provision of an opportunity for parents and family members to ask questions and share concerns about their needs and priorities in a supportive and non-judgmental environment goes a long way toward building a collaborative relationship with the family.

Exosystem: Community Connection

The inclusion of individuals with disabilities in both education as well as the larger aspects of society reflects a much larger multicultural global trend (Erhard & Umanksy, 2005; Gaad, 2004). Inclusion in education is but one aspect of the broader social integration of children (Dyson, 2005; Guralnick, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Inclusion in not only the classroom setting but also in after-school activities provides important opportunities for meaningful interactions between children with and without disabilities.

Different approaches to the involvement of families in after-school activities have provided examples of the positive impact such activities may have upon the development of young children. For example, Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an after-school, multi-family support program to increase parent involvement in schools, build family-community networks through schools, and improve the academic and social outcomes of children (McDonald et al., 2006; McDonald, Billingham, Conrad, Morgan, & Payton, 1997; McDonald, Coe-Braddish, Billingham, Dibble, & Rice, 1991). Thousands of

low-income families from diverse backgrounds have increased their involvement in schools and communities through the FAST project since its inception in 1988. It has been implemented in more than 800 schools in 45 states and five countries. Positive outcomes of target children include significantly better academic performance, decreased aggressive behavior, and increased social skills (McDonald et al., 2006). In addition, it has shown a positive effect regarding less substance abuse among diverse low-income, urban families. Issues such as income and family-school-community connection are extremely important factors that may influence the effectiveness of intervention in families of children with disabilities.

In the FAST program, a collaborative, culturally diverse team of parents and professionals forms a multi-family group to engage the parents in building social networks through the schools. In these relationships, different levels of the child's social ecology are considered and appear to act as protective factors against the occurrence of negative behaviors such as substance abuse. This multi-family group model emphasizes high engagement and retention rates that reflect the cultural norms of the Latino community. Consistent research findings have supported the primacy of extended families in Latino communities including those of Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (e.g., McDonald et al., 2006; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). Respect for parents as active partners in the process of supporting the child's school success clearly is a key part of the FAST project.

Projects such as FAST teaming are effective because they value the interdependence within the ecological system, an ultimate goal of inclusion. Within this system, the community or societal structure based on reciprocal relationships is a key, yet often lacking, component for families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Research has suggested that the social network beyond school and family does play a critical role in both family functioning and successful intervention for children with disabilities in areas of academic performance, classroom behaviors, and peer social skills. It appears to be especially beneficial for multi-family groups with different cultural backgrounds who may not have social networks available otherwise.

Another model involving parents of children with more severe disabilities such as autism is the Family-Centered Preschool Model that was designed to augment the family support provided by classroom staff members within center-based preschool programs (Kaczmarek, Goldstein, Florey, Carter, & Cannon, 2004). In this model, parents of children with disabilities are assigned as family consultants. The family consultants provide information and support to other families who are receiving early intervention services in the same community. The family consultants, as parents of children with disabilities as well

as paraprofessional members of the early intervention staff, act as a liaison between families and professional staff, the agency, and the broader community. Kaczmarek and colleagues found that families who participated in this program benefited in multiple ways such as obtaining information about specific disabilities, resources, school options, family rights, transition to kindergarten, and potty training. Family members also indicated benefits and support they received from not only the family consultants, but also from other participating families. In addition, the project had a positive impact on parenting skills. For example, parents reported that the project provided support and information, which in turn had helped them to provide better service and advocate for their children. Not surprisingly, positive effects on child outcomes were also observed.

Macrosystem: Cultural Influence

We defined cultural influence as social and/or environmental factors that influence the beliefs and behaviors of individuals who are involved in the systems. According to Lindsey and colleagues (2003), an individual's cultural proficiency in education is the level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that are critical for successful teaching and interaction with students. To be culturally proficient, one needs to understand the concept of diversity that encompasses acceptance, inclusiveness, and respect (Lindsey et al.). One must also realize that each individual is a unique but at the same time inseparable unit within the multi-level systems.

Cultural influence exists in all contexts from immediate family environment to larger social settings within the ecological systems. It guides one's implicit thoughts and feelings towards a specific phenomenon as well as one's explicit behaviors in a social interaction. Weisner (2002) examined cultural influence within the ecological-cultural context and suggested that cultural pathways are made up of everyday routines of life. These routines are cultural activities in which children from different backgrounds may act or react differently. For example, one might expect that children growing up in a culture that bestows significant value to the sibling relationship would respond differently to a brother's or sister's disability than children raised in a culture in which sibling relationships are secondary, even to friendships. Yet cultural context has been given minimal attention in research on sibling adaptation to disability with but a few exceptions.

Culture-related values are reflected in the quality of sibling relationships. Cultures that highly value collectivity and group identity tend to have strong, close sibling relationships. For example, in Latino cultures, siblings' daily lives

tend to be highly intertwined, and sibling caretaking and companionship are routines, as compared to European American youth who report greater levels of companionship with their friends than with their siblings (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). One study reported that European American children more often directed and rejected their younger siblings' play than Mexican children, who more often commented on and joined in their younger siblings' play (Farver, 1993). In cultures that value sibling companionship and caretaking, older siblings are often given more responsibility by their parents while younger children receive more attention from their parents and older siblings.

On the other hand, in cultures that value the autonomy of the individual child, sibling relationships are less interdependent, and siblings tend to become competitors for their parents' attention. Parents often seek to foster individual identity and achievement, to treat siblings "equally and fairly," and to protect siblings from being "overburdened" by each other's care (Weisner, 1993). Therefore, when one child with a disability receives more attention and care from parents because of his or her special needs, the impact on the child's siblings will vary from culture to culture. The context of cultural beliefs and expectations for sibling companionship and intimacy should be considered when we identify family concerns and needs because of the role they may play in effective intervention for the child with special needs.

Conclusion

Creating inclusive educational programs for diverse groups of young children is a complex and often daunting task. Traditionally, educational practices have reflected a "one size fits all" approach to both curriculum and strategy that ignores fundamental individual differences. Educational programs for young children often reflect practices that homogenize settings to produce an unrealistic uniformity among students that is not reflected in the pluralistic societies in which they live. We now recognize the value that is added to the preschool education experience by diversity and have, in the last few years, attempted to identify critical aspects of successful inclusive programs. Key among them has been parent and family involvement and support for inclusion.

We believe, from both our reading of the available literature and our extensive clinical experience, that the enablement and empowerment of families should be a goal of all educational programs. To reach this goal we need a dynamic, systematic, and comprehensive approach that reflects an awareness and appreciation for the complex ways in which systems act and interact to influence outcomes. The developmental ecological systems model is one of the approaches trying to address this complex set of variables. This model has been

supported with well-established research and evidence-based practices. When educational practices that support inclusion focus upon all systems with active family involvement as the focus of concern, we will be able to achieve the more important goal of education: to prepare our youth for a life that reflects an appreciation of the value and fundamental worth of each individual.

References

- Anderson, K. J., & Minke, K. M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *The Journal of Educational Research, 100*(5), 311-323.
- Berger, E. H. (1995). *Parents as partners in education: Families and schools working together*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1988). Interacting systems in human development. Research paradigms: Present and future. In N. Bolger, A. Caspi, G. Downey, & M. Moorehouse (Eds.), *Persons in context: Developmental processes* (pp. 25-49). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological system theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development: Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 187-250). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & R. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development* (5th ed., pp. 993-1028). New York: Wiley.
- Brown, K. E., & Medway, F. J. (2007). School climate and teacher beliefs in a school effectively serving poor South Carolina (USA) African-American students: A case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, 529-540.
- Bruder, M. B. (2000). Family-centered early intervention: Clarifying our values for the new millennium. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20*(2), 105-115.
- Calabrese Barton, A., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban elementary schools. *Educational Researcher, 33*(4), 3-12.
- Christenson, S. L., Hurley, C. M., Sheridan, S. M., & Fenstermacher, K. (1997). Parents' and school psychologists' perspectives on parent involvement activities. *School Psychology Review, 26*(1), 111-130.
- Cooper, C. W., & Christie, C. A. (2005). Evaluating parent empowerment: A look at the potential of social justice evaluation in education. *Teacher College Record, 107*(10), 2248-2274.
- DeRosier, M., & Kupersmidt, J. B. (1991). Costa Rican children's perceptions of their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 27*(4), 656-662.
- Dodd, L. W. (2004). Supporting the siblings of young children with disabilities. *British Journal of Special Education, 31*(1), 41-49.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., Davis, M., & Cornwell, J. (1988). Enabling and empowering families of children with health impairments. *Children's Health Care, 17*(2), 71-81.
- Dyson, L. (2005). Kindergarten children's understanding of and attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*(2), 95-105.
- Erhard, R., & Umanksy, T. (2005). School counselors' involvement in the process of inclusion in Israel. *International Journal of Disability, Development, & Education, 52*(3), 175-194.

- Farver, J. A. (1993). Cultural differences in scaffolding pretend play: A comparison of American and Mexican mother-child and sibling-child pairs. In K. MacDonald (Ed.), *Parent-child play: Descriptions and implications* (pp. 349-366). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Filler, J., & Xu, Y. (2006). Including children with disabilities in early childhood education programs: Individualizing developmentally appropriate practices. *Childhood Education*, 83(2), 92-98.
- Fine, M. (1993). Apparent involvement: Reflections on parents, power, and urban public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 94, 683-710.
- Fox, T. J., & Williams, W. (1991). *Implementing best practices for all students in their local school*. Burlington, VT: Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Vermont.
- Gaad, E. (2004). Cross-cultural perspectives on the effect of cultural attitudes towards inclusion for children with intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 8(3), 311-328.
- Guralnick, M. J. (Ed.) (2001). *Early childhood inclusion: Focus on change*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Guralnick, M. J. (1994). Social competence with peers: Outcome and process in early childhood special education. In P. Safford (Ed.), *Early childhood special education* (pp. 45-72). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Sandler, H. (1997). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 97, 310-332.
- Hunt, P., Soto, G., Maier, J., Liboiron, N., & Bae, S. (2004). Collaborative teaming to support preschoolers with severe disabilities who are placed in general education early childhood programs. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 24(3), 123-142.
- Kaczmarek, L. A., Goldstein, H., Florey, J. D., Carter, A., & Cannon, S. (2004). Supporting families: A preschool model. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 24(4), 213-226.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 37-53.
- Levy, S., Kim, A., & Olive, M. L. (2006). Interventions for young children with autism: A synthesis of the literature. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 21(1), 55-62.
- Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R. (2003). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- McCormick, L. (2006). Planning and evaluation/monitoring. In M. J. Noonan & L. McCormick (Eds.), *Young children with disabilities in natural environments: Methods and procedures* (pp. 99-108). Baltimore: Brookes.
- McDonald, L., Billingham, S., Conrad, T., Morgan, A. O. N., & Payton, E. (1997). Families and schools together (FAST): Integrating community development with clinical strategy. *Families in Society*, 78, 140-155.
- McDonald, L., Coe-Braddish, D., Billingham, S., Dibble, N., & Rice, C. (1991). Families and schools together: An innovative substance abuse prevention program. *Social Work in Education*, 13, 118-128.
- McDonald, L., Moberg, D. P., Brown, R., Rodriguez-Espiricueta, I., Flores, N. I., Burke, M. P., et al. (2006). A randomized controlled trial involving low-income, urban, Latino children. *Children & Schools*, 28(1), 25-34.
- Noonan, M. J., & McCormick, L. (2006). *Young children with disabilities in natural environments: Methods and procedures*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Odom, S., Peck, C. A., Hanson, M. J., Beckman, P. J., Kaiser, A. P., Lieber, J., et al. (1996). Inclusion at the preschool level: An ecological analysis. *Social Policy Report*, 10(2-3), 18-30.

- Palmer, D. S., Fuller, K., Arora, T., & Nelson, M. (2001). Taking sides: Parent views on inclusion for their children with severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 67, 467-486.
- Pérez Carreón, G., Drake, C., & Calabrese Barton, A. (2005). The importance of presence: Immigrant parent's school engagement experiences. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(3), 465-498.
- Pit-Ten Cate, I., & Loots, G. (2000). Experiences of siblings of children with physical disabilities: An empirical investigation. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 22(9), 399-408.
- Ryan, A. K., Kay, P. J., Fitzgerald, M., Paquette, S., & Smith, S. (2001). A case study in parent-teacher action research. *Teaching Exceptional Education*, 33(3), 56-61.
- Salend, S. J. (2006). Explaining your inclusion program to families. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38(4), 6-11.
- Sandall, S., & Schwartz, I. S. (2002). *Building blocks for teaching preschoolers with special needs*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Santiago-Rivera, I., Arredondo, P., & Gallardo-Cooper, M. (2002). *Counseling Latinos and la familia: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sharpe, D., & Rossiter, L. (2002). Siblings of children with a chronic illness: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 27, 699-710.
- Siegel, B. (1996). Is the emperor wearing clothes? Social policy and the empirical support for full inclusion of children with disabilities in the preschool and early elementary grades. *Social Policy Report*, 10(2-3), 2-17.
- Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1990). Inclusive schooling. In S. Stainback & W. Stainback (Eds.), *Support networks for inclusive schooling: Interdependent integrated education* (pp. 3-23). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Stoneman, Z., & Berman, P. W. (Eds.). (1993). *The effects of mental retardation, disability, and illness on sibling relationships: Research issues and challenges*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Vandercook, T., York, J., & Forest, M. (1989). The McGill Action Planning System (MAPS): A strategy for building the vision. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 14(3), 205-215.
- Weisner, T. S. (1993). Ethnographic and ecocultural perspectives on sibling relationships. In Z. Stoneman & P. W. Berman (Eds.), *The effects of mental retardation, disability, and illness on sibling relationships: Research issues and challenges* (pp. 51-83). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Weisner, T. S. (2002). Ecocultural understanding of children's developmental pathways. *Human Development*, 45(4), 275-281.
- Weiss, H. M., & Edwards, M. E. (1992). The family-school collaboration project: Systemic intervention for school improvement. In S. L. Christenson & J. L. Connolly (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration: Enhancing children's academic and social competence*. Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Williams, D. L., & Stallworth, J. T. (1984). *Parent involvement in education: What a survey reveals*. Austin, TX: Southwest Regional Educational Development Laboratory.
- Xu, Y., Gelfer, J. I., & Filler, J. (2003). An alternative undergraduate teacher preparation program in early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 173(5), 489-497.

Yaoying Xu is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education and Disability Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. Xu's research has been centered on social aspects of children with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Her specific research interests involve culturally appropriate learning contexts for young English language learners, the impact of

social interactions of young children on their school performance, empowering culturally diverse families of young children with disabilities, and linking assessment and intervention for infants and young children who are at risk for disabilities/delays. Correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Yaoying Xu, Virginia Commonwealth University, Oliver Hall Room 4071, 1015 W. Main St., P. O. Box 842020, Richmond, VA 23284-2020.

John Filler is professor of early childhood special education in the Department of Special Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He also serves as the faculty coordinator for the Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center, a cooperative university/public school preschool located on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is the author of numerous articles on inclusive practices for young children.

Expectations of Chinese Families of Children with Disabilities Towards American Schools

Lusa Lo

Abstract

Working collaboratively with culturally and linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities can sometimes be a challenge for educators and service providers. As the number of Asian students with disabilities continues to increase, very little research has focused on how collaborative partnerships can be developed between schools and their families. The purpose of this study was to examine the expectations of 12 Chinese families of children with disabilities towards American schools. One-on-one interviews were used in the study. Results suggested that the participants had five expectations from American schools: (1) accessibility of quality interpreters, (2) cultural sensitivity among professionals, (3) advocacy, (4) home-school communication, and (5) parent education. Implications for applying research to practice are discussed.

Key Words: home-school partnerships, culturally, linguistically diverse families, Chinese families, family, schools, disabilities, special education students, disability, special needs, parents, communication, Asian, advocacy

Introduction

Since 1975, several regulations protecting the rights of children and youth with disabilities aged 3 to 21 years old have been made and revised in the United States. These regulations include the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), IDEA

Amendments of 1997 (IDEA '97), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004). In order to ensure that these children and youth receive free and appropriate education, the regulations state clearly that parents must be members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, meeting annually with professionals to discuss the services and placements of students with disabilities. Numerous parental rights are stated in the regulations. For example, parents can request IEP meetings any time during the year and discuss their children's educational program; parents can request that schools conduct evaluations when disabilities are suspected to be the cause of poor academic performance; schools must provide parents with progress reports regarding their children's performance toward the IEP goals and objectives; and parents can request to have evaluation reports sent to them before IEP meetings. One purpose of these rights is to inform schools that parents' voices are important and should be included in the development of their child's educational program.

It is undeniable that the U.S population has changed rapidly in the past few decades. Between 1980 and 2006, the rate of increase for the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) population was very high, between 41% and 269% (see Table 1; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). This drastic change in population directly and dramatically affects the demographics of the school-age population. Currently, CLD students comprise almost half (43%) of the school-age population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Among the students receiving special education in 2005-2006, 41% of them were from the diverse population (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). While the number of CLD students with and without disabilities increased rapidly, less than 20% of educators (general and special education) were from the CLD population (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006; University of Florida, 2003). The diverse student population, combined with the shortage of teachers from diverse backgrounds, is forcing schools to evaluate their ways of collaborating with CLD families.

Table 1. Changes in U.S. Population, 1980 – 2006, by Race and Ethnicity

	1980	1990	2000	2006	Growth 1980 – 2006
White	181,140	188,725	195,769	197,841	9%
African American	26,215	29,439	34,413	37,052	41%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1,336	1,793	2,104	2,370	77%
Hispanic	14,869	22,573	35,647	44,253	198%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3,665	7,092	10,827	13,528	269%

Note. Numbers are in thousands.

Existing literature suggests that developing an effective home-school partnership with CLD families of children with disabilities has been a challenge (e.g., Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Lian & Fontànez-Phelan, 2001; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001; Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003). These studies suggested that cultural differences between families and schools could affect the level of home-school partnership. Some CLD families felt that educators did not respect their cultural background. Zionts et al. interviewed African American families of 24 children with moderate to severe disabilities regarding their perceptions of cultural sensitivity demonstrated by the school district. These families felt that many teachers, especially the Caucasian teachers, did not have a solid cultural understanding of them and their children. Some families also reported that cultural sensitivity did not exist in their children's school. In another study, Park, Turnbull, and Park (2001) conducted in-depth phone interviews with 10 Korean American parents of children with disabilities regarding their perceptions of their partnerships with professionals who served their children. One parent reported that the objectives professionals developed for her child were unrealistic. One objective was for the child to explore the texture of different foods with (his or her) fingers. However, in the Korean culture, touching food with hands was not encouraged.

The second common challenge that CLD families face is the language barrier (e.g., Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Tellier-Robinson, 2000). The shortage of bilingual professionals restricts non- and limited-English speaking families from accessing information and programs which could be helpful to their child with disabilities. Park et al. (2001) reported that language barriers isolated 8 of the 10 limited-English speaking parents interviewed from meaningful partnerships with service providers, limited their access to basic information and advocacy, and prevented them from participating actively in school meetings and events. In another relevant study, Tellier-Robinson (2000) interviewed nine Portuguese-speaking families regarding their involvement in their child's education. These parents also reported that because of their limited English abilities, they were unable to attend many meetings and events organized by the schools. These parents did not feel that they were welcome to speak with school officials regarding their child. In addition, the CLD parents stated that other barriers, such as inflexible work schedules and a lack of transportation and child care services, prevented them from being active school participants (Peña, 2000).

Although many studies attempt to determine how schools can better involve families of children with disabilities (Hughes et al., 2002; Lian & Fontànez-Phelan, 2001; Peña, 2000; Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999; Zetlin, Padron, & Wilson, 1996), a majority of these studies focus on African

American and Hispanic families of children with disabilities. Although Asian students with disabilities are under-represented in special education, the number of Asian students with disabilities continues to increase, making them the third largest group to receive special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, 2007). Combined with the shortage of bilingual educators, there is a need for more research to examine whether or not the needs of the Asian families of children with disabilities are being met and how schools can collaborate with these families effectively. The purpose of this study was to examine the expectations of Chinese families of children with disabilities towards American schools. The findings of this study can add to the store of information schools need to develop effective home-school partnerships with this population.

Method

Participants

Twelve Chinese parents of children with disabilities were the participants of the study. All parents were immigrants from China. Their length of stay in the U.S. ranged from 3 years to 15 years. One parent spoke Mandarin, while the others spoke Cantonese (see Table 2 for the demographics of the participants). One participant had two children with disabilities, another participant had three children with disabilities, and the remaining families each had one child with a disability. The disabilities of the participants' children ranged from mild to severe (see Table 3).

Parents participating in this study were identified through collaboration with two parent support groups in Eastern Massachusetts. At the time of the study, these two groups were the only ones in the area that served Chinese families of children with disabilities. One group served five families, and the second group served seven families. The researcher was invited by the coordinators of both support groups to attend their monthly group meetings to meet the families, inform them of the purpose of the study, and recruit participants. All 12 parents from both groups were eager to share their expectations of schools with the researcher and expressed interest in participating in the study. The researcher of this study has unique qualifications which enable her to communicate freely with the participants without cultural and linguistic barriers. She is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin, and has extensive experience in special education.

Table 2. Demographic Information of the Participants

Parents	Highest Degree Earned	Occupation	Economic Status ^a	English Proficiency ^b
1	Associate degree	Housewife	High	Fluent
2	Bachelor's degree in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
3	Bachelor's degree	Self-employed	High	Fluent
4	5th-grade in home country	Housewife	Low	Non
5	Master's degree	Computer engineer	High	Fluent
6	High school graduate in home country	Accountant clerk	High	Fluent
7	Sixth grade in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
8	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Non
9	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
10	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
11	High school graduate in home country	Salesperson	Low	Fluent
12	High school graduate in home country	Factory worker	Low	Limited

^aThe economic status was determined by the income level reported by the participants.

^bThe level of English language proficiency was reported by the participants.

Table 3. Demographic Information of Participants' Children

	# of Participants' Children
Grade level	
Elementary	10
Secondary	5
Gender	
Male	10
Female	5
Types of disabilities	
Hearing impairment	1
Specific learning disability	1
Autism	9
Intellectual impairment	4
Placement	
General education classrooms with in-class support	3
Substantial separate classrooms	12

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study. Interviews are commonly used in studies that investigate the perceptions of families of children with disabilities toward schools (Park et al., 2001; Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998). There were two advantages of collecting data using an interview format. First, using personal interviews to collect information on participants' experiences provided more in-depth, personal, and elaborated information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Second, the interview process allowed the researcher and participants to interact (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001). The Chinese population is considered a people of a high-context culture (Chan & Lee, 2004), which means that their communication style relies more on nonverbal than verbal language. One-on-one interviews were helpful in eliciting detailed information. Finally, given their view of family privacy, Chinese parents were assumed to consider family matters involving their children with disabilities as private matters which should not be openly discussed with others (Hyun & Fowler, 1995). Interviewing each participant individually was therefore more appropriate than using other formats of data collection.

Before the interviews took place, the researcher attended four monthly meetings in each of the two support groups. This opportunity allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the participating families. Each family was asked to select a convenient location for the interview to take place; all chose their home. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Brief follow-up phone interviews were also conducted for clarifications.

The interview guide, consisting of 15 open-ended questions, was derived from the work of previous researchers (e.g., Park et al., 2001; Pruitt et al., 1998; see Table 4 for sample questions). Some questions were added based on the participants' responses. During the interview, the researcher probed parents to be specific and provide in-depth information. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, the participants' preferred language. Permission was also obtained for the interviews to be audiotaped. (Note: All names used are pseudonyms.)

Table 4. Sample Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a brief history of your child's disability.
2. What is your role in your child's education?
3. Please describe your relationship with your child's school.
4. Have you experienced any challenges when interacting with school professionals? What are those challenges?
5. What are your expectations of the school and professionals (teachers and other service providers)?

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim into Chinese by the researcher, who is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin. All participants were invited to review the transcripts for accuracy. Two participants required the researcher to include additional information in their transcript, while the other parents reported that no change was needed. Next, the researcher translated all transcripts into English. A graduate student who was fluent in both Chinese and English was asked to review the translations for accuracy; the overall rate of agreement was 95%.

A coding system was developed to analyze the interview data. The researcher examined all interview transcripts and searched for common themes. Using the constant comparative method as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), categories were developed. If any of the data did not belong to any of these categories, new categories were established. After all the data were coded, two graduate students were asked to review the transcripts independently and determine the accuracy of coding. A 90% interrater reliability was found. The researcher and the graduate students discussed the differences until consensus was reached.

Results

The participants of this study reported that they were very thankful that their children could attend schools in the U.S. and receive special education services. However, these parents faced many challenges when trying to advocate for their children and collaborate with professionals such as educators and service providers. Based upon the 12 Chinese parents' responses, they had five expectations from the American schools: accessibility of quality interpreters, cultural sensitivity among professionals, advocacy, home-school communication, and parent education.

Accessibility of Quality Interpreters

The Chinese parents included in the study were very concerned about their children's performance in school and wanted to be informed regarding their children's progress. Although interpreters were provided by many schools in IEP meetings, they were unavailable during other school hours. The seven participants who were non- or limited-English speakers reported that they did not have the language proficiency to maintain close contact with the professionals. Something as simple as informing their child's teachers that their child was sick and had to miss school was a challenge for these parents. One mother of a 12-year-old son with intellectual impairment said,

I don't know English. Someone told me that I could write to the teacher in Chinese and someone at the school could translate the message to her, but the teacher never responded. I don't know other ways to communicate with the teacher.

Additionally, these seven parents were often reluctant to attend school events because they were unable to communicate with the teachers. A mother of two children with autism said,

I always want to go to Open House. That's the best opportunity for me to speak with the teacher, but there was nobody who could help me. I wish there were a person who could interpret for me...follow me around. I tried several times to go and speak with the teacher by myself, but it didn't work. It was very difficult because of my English.

Being unable to read the school documents was another challenge the Chinese parents faced. Documents such as IEP reports were often not translated in a timely manner. According to the parents, English IEPs were usually mailed to them one or two weeks after meetings, but the translated IEPs would not be available until two to five months after the meetings. According to the state regulations, upon receiving the IEP, parents are required to return a signed copy to the school within 30 days (MA Department of Education, 2007). In order to follow the regulations, parents would have to sign the IEPs without knowing the contents of the document. One parent who had an 8-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy said,

I didn't know that her PT [physical therapy] services were terminated. One time, I spoke with a Chinese paraprofessional at my daughter's school. I asked her how come I never received a progress report from the PT. She told me that my daughter has stopped receiving PT since last month. I was shocked....A few months later, I received the translated IEP and her PT services were really removed.

This parent felt that if she had received the translated IEP earlier, she would have known about the changes in her daughter's services. When I asked the parent whether or not this matter was discussed at the IEP meetings, she reported that she was not aware of it. If the changes in her daughter's services had been discussed at the meetings, then the interpreter did not interpret the message to her. Four other parents, one non-English speaker and three limited-English speakers, also felt that if interpreters had been available in school during other hours, the parents could have obtained help from the interpreters and found out about the contents of the IEPs before signing them.

The five participants who considered themselves fluent English speakers also reported difficulties understanding some of the terminology used by

professionals in meetings and on evaluation reports. These parents stated that evaluation reports were often written with technical terms (e.g., standard scores and percentile ranks) and acronyms (e.g., WJ-III and ABAS-II) that confused them. They wanted professionals to know that although the parents were fluent English speakers, they were not trained in special education. Professionals should not assume that parents can understand the technical terms commonly used among them. In order to ensure that all team members had the same information and could discuss it in meetings, the parents suggested that the professionals avoid using specialized terminology. If certain terms must be used, the parents reasoned, then the professionals should make sure that parents understand them. These parents also felt that having interpreters in schools would help resolve this challenge.

According to the participants, having full-time interpreters could be beneficial to both schools and parents. Interpreters could provide parents with assistance whenever they need assistance, such as speaking with professionals during the hours outside of IEP meetings. The interpreters could also help proofread any documents that were sent home to ensure that they did not contain any technical terms. Because these interpreters usually had the same cultural backgrounds as parents, they could also bridge the cultural gaps between schools and Chinese families.

Cultural Sensitivity Among Professionals

The second expectation the Chinese families had on schools was the need to train professionals to be culturally sensitive. They felt that it was very disrespectful when schools sent home documents that were not written in their language. They did not feel that schools wanted to be their equal partners. Moreover, four of the participants reported that on several occasions, some professionals were particularly insensitive to the parent's culture. One of the parents of a 17-year-old daughter with autism said,

The speech teacher said that Katherine didn't have eye contact, so she didn't teach her pronunciation. I was really upset about this....Every parent at the school doesn't like this teacher. There are two other parents of kids with special needs also think that she is crazy. I scolded her at the meeting. I asked her whether or not she has ever taken the civilization course....In America, every single college considers that to be a required course now. I told her that there are many cultures in this world that students don't look at the teacher in the eye because it's impolite, and you can get whacked. Then I asked her, "How does a blind child learn how to speak? They shouldn't have eye contact. Right?" She said that she had this and that experience. Then I asked her, "How many Chinese autistic

children have you taught?”...I did not fight for more time slots with her. I [would] rather have my child spend more time with other teachers who can teach. Why bother to waste time, since she said my daughter doesn’t have eye contact, and she doesn’t want to teach her. If she doesn’t teach her pronunciation, then that’s not speech. If she doesn’t teach her pronunciation, then she is wasting my daughter’s time.

Another parent of a 9-year-old son with autism also felt that her son’s teacher did not like her to be included in school activities due to her ethnicity. She said,

Sometimes the teacher sent home notes about class field trips. I used to check the box saying that I could go with the class. However, the teacher never wanted me to go....I don’t know why. She never told me why. It happened so many times...so now I check the box saying that I cannot go....I don’t want to think that it’s because I am Chinese. But when she did that all the time, it’s hard not to wonder if it’s really because of my race. I can speak English. I can communicate with the teacher, the students, and all the other parents, so why didn’t she want me to go? I don’t know.

Four of the Chinese parents also reported that sometimes the professionals would offer some suggestions that were culturally insensitive. For example, one mother said that a professional suggested she should cut up the child’s food in pieces so that the child can feed herself with a fork. However, the family often had porridge and noodle soup for dinner. It was very difficult for her to be compliant with the teacher’s suggestion. This parent felt that if the professionals tried to get to know the family, such unrealistic suggestions could be avoided.

Advocacy

Due to many reasons, such as budgeting issues and shortage of staff, all the participants believed that school professionals might not advocate for their children. The parents felt that if they relied on schools to advocate for their children, their children might not get the services they needed. A mother of an 11-year-old son with Hunter’s Syndrome said,

They [professionals] know that my son needs an aide to help him because he swallows anything he sees. It’s dangerous....He had swallowed crayons and erasers before. One time, his teacher pulled me aside and told me that she also felt that my son should have an aide with him. Ah! Why didn’t she say that at the meeting?

Nine of the parents reported that they had invited paid or free advocates to accompany them to IEP meetings. The parents considered an advocate as someone more knowledgeable than themselves regarding special education law and the types of services their child needed. One mother of a child with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) said,

When my son turned 3 years old, he went to public school. He didn't have any services. No speech. No OT. Even in class, he only received 15 minutes of indirect services. I finally hired an advocate. After that, they gave me 1 hour speech and 1 hour OT. The second year, I saw that he still didn't have any speech. The advocate helped me fight for 1½ hours of speech. This is what I had to do.

All the parents felt that because professionals were more knowledgeable than they were regarding their children's disabilities and what services they needed, the parents wanted the professionals to speak up and advocate for their child. Children should always come first. If a professional knew that certain services or support should be provided to the child or that certain curriculum should be used instead of another, then that professional should advocate for the child and inform the other professionals in the team. The parents felt that it was very ineffective and exhausting if they were the only ones who kept asking for the support and services their child needed.

Home-School Communication

Maintaining communication is one of the keys to successful home-school partnerships. Because many of the participants' children were unable to inform their parents about their school days, parents indicated that they would like teachers to let them know what their child did and what his/her behavior was like in school. Although some teachers used daily notebooks to inform parents about their child's progress, seven of the parents reported that many of the teachers' messages were very brief, such as "Tom did well today" or "Katie appeared to be very tired today." These messages did not really inform parents about what their child did in school. Additionally, because homework was often not assigned to these children, parents were unable to know what their children had learned in school.

Furthermore, two parents stated that they often had difficulties staying in touch with their child's teacher. One father of a son with PDD said that he tried many times to set up an appointment with the teacher, but the teacher never responded. He said,

I called her at school...left messages. I e-mailed her. When I dropped my son off in the morning, I asked her to set up a time. She said she would

get back to me, but she never did. I want to observe my son in the classroom. I want to learn how the teacher teaches him...what methods they use, so I can use them at home.

This parent did consider contacting the school principal regarding this matter. However, he was worried that if he did, it could destroy his relationship with the teacher and would eventually do harm to his son, so he decided not to pursue this matter. This father felt that his son's teacher might have misinterpreted that his reason for observing the class was to check up on her.

The participants suggested that teachers send home informal daily progress notes that included such information as their child's school performance and if there were any skills that they could reinforce at home. The parents suggested that for the parents who did not speak English fluently, the notes should be written in their primary language. Furthermore, they felt that professionals should send home their child's daily schedule and that parents should be welcome to visit their child's class anytime during school hours.

Parent Education

All the parents stated that they had limited knowledge about their child's disability and how to best provide support for their children. Because all the parents had been educated outside of the U.S., they were not familiar with the school system and teaching methods that were used in this country. However, they felt it was their duty to supplement their child's education at home. Three parents, all highly educated in the U.S., stated that they had tried to search for information about how to teach their children. However, the information on the internet was limited. These parents needed hands-on demonstrations. They wanted the professionals to take the time to educate them in these areas. Several parents said that because they did not know the appropriate methods to teach their children, they often used the same methods used when they were students in China. They knew that those teaching methods were old and might not be the most effective ones, but they did not know how best to become informed of the current teaching practices. One mother said regarding her daughter, "I felt that because I didn't know how to help her, I was actually doing more harm than good to her." If parents could be informed regarding the strategies the professionals used at school, they believed their child could make better progress.

Discussion

The relationship between families and school is crucial in supporting our children (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The findings of this study indicated that all participating Chinese families tried their best

in supporting their children with disabilities. All the parents were thankful that their children with disabilities could continue receiving education. These parents understood that collaborating with professionals was vital. However, many barriers, such as cultural and language differences, prevented them from participating fully. The 12 Chinese parents in this study reported that they had several expectations from the schools and hoped that the schools would be willing to collaborate with them and make the best decisions for their children.

Regardless of their level of English proficiency, the Chinese parents in this study encountered difficulty communicating with professionals in and outside of IEP meetings. The parents who were not fluent in English were unable to understand all the school documents that were written in English. Due to the unavailability of interpreters, communicating with professionals continued to be a challenge for these parents. On the other hand, parents who were fluent in English also reported that the terminology that was commonly used by professionals often confused them. These parents felt that the key to successful home-school partnerships was communication. Having interpreters available in schools could help bring the home closer to the schools. Similar to the Chinese parents of the study, the Latino parents in Hughes et al.'s (2001) study also experienced difficulties communicating with professionals. They strongly urged schools to hire interpreters, so they would be available at all times during school hours to support the parents who were not fluent English speakers. Interpreters could not only help bridge the communication gap between parents and professionals but also help translate materials, such as IEPs and informal progress notes, so all parents could be informed.

Another key factor to successful home-school partnerships is having culturally sensitive staff members in the school (Voltz, 1994). The Chinese parents in this study reported that some professionals in their child's school did not respect their culture and would sometimes offer unrealistic suggestions to them regarding how to work with their children. Flett and Conderman (2001) suggested that professionals take the time to learn about parents' cultural beliefs and values. The professionals' knowledge and appreciation of the parents' culture would allow them to have effective communication and develop a trusting relationship with parents (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998). However, professionals must be aware that although there may be a set of common values within each cultural subgroup, it is important to view each family as a unique unit influenced by its culture, but not defined by it (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Furthermore, professionals should be honest about what is best for their students. When the children with disabilities require certain services in order to be successful, the educators and service providers should advocate for them. Parents should not be the only ones who advocate for their children,

because some of these parents might not have the knowledge and language abilities to fulfill their advocacy roles.

Immigrants who are new to the U.S. may not be familiar with the system of special education system in America. In China, there are only three categories of disabilities: visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental retardation (Yang, Ding, & Chang, 2007). However, in the U.S., there are 13 different disability categories. The description of each disability may also be different among the countries. In other words, assuming that parents are familiar with their child's disability is detrimental. The Chinese parents of this study were very involved in their children's academic careers. However, due to a lack of knowledge regarding their child's disability, parents often did not know what services would be appropriate for their children and had to rely heavily on the professionals' opinions. Furthermore, because these parents were not educated in the U.S. and were not familiar with the current teaching methods for their children, they felt that their inability to teach their children was an obstacle to their children's success. These parents were desperate to advocate for their children and receive information about how to best support their children at home. Organizing parent education nights could address this challenge and ensure that the same teaching methods were used in both school and home.

In order to build effective relationships, schools and CLD parents must make an effort to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps. By understanding the Chinese parents' expectations of schools, immediate action should be taken to eliminate these gaps. Otherwise, professionals and Chinese parents will continue to face challenges collaborating with each other, and the end result will impact the children negatively.

Although this study provides information regarding the expectations of Chinese parents of children with disabilities of schools, several limitations do apply. First, only the expectations of 12 Chinese families of children with disabilities were examined. Results of this study should not be generalized to all Chinese families of children with disabilities. Second, some information might have been lost during translation. Although the researcher and translator were fluent in Chinese and English, many terms and phrases in Chinese could not be directly translated into English. Therefore, English words which could capture the general meaning were used. Finally, only the parents' perspectives were investigated in this study. Inclusion of the perspectives of professionals might have provided more insight into the development of effective home-school partnerships. Despite these limitations, this study did provide further insight into the existing literature regarding the expectations of the Chinese families of children with disabilities towards school and how schools could develop collaborative partnerships with this population.

Implications for Research to Practice

Based on the interviews, the following recommendations are offered as ways to develop more effective partnerships between CLD families and schools.


1. In order to ensure that there is no communication gap between schools and homes, having full-time interpreters at schools would be crucial. However, as school budgets continue to shrink every year, instead of having full-time interpreters, schools may want to consider having part-time interpreters of different languages available on certain days of the week. For example, having a Spanish interpreter on Monday and Tuesday, Chinese interpreter on Wednesday and Thursday, and Portuguese interpreter on Tuesday and Friday. Both educators and parents can seek language supports on the days the interpreters are available.
2. Many of the interpreters schools hire may not have knowledge in the field (and vocabulary) of special education. It would be important for schools to provide them with training so that their translation and interpretation services to CLD families can be more effective. If such training is not possible, educators and service providers are strongly advised to meet with the interpreters prior to meetings to insure that they will be able to provide quality translations.
3. As the number of CLD children with disabilities continues to increase in the U.S., school districts should consider hiring more professionals and paraprofessionals from diverse cultures. Universities could also collaborate with school districts so that they can recruit and train more linguistically diverse credential candidates for the special education field. These professionals could not only help communicate with CLD parents during school hours, but also bridge the cultural gap between schools and home.
4. Informing parents regarding their child's progress is crucial. However, such a daily progress note is often written in English and does not include sufficient information. In order to address teachers' busy schedule, creating a daily progress note template (see Figure 1) and having it translated at the beginning of the year would be helpful. Teachers and/or paraprofessionals can simply fill in the information which informs parents regarding what their child has worked on at school.
5. In addition to reporting to parents regarding their child's progress, educators should consider using a portion of the parent-teacher conference time to share some teaching strategies with parents, so that they can use the same methods to reinforce their child's skills at home. It is more effective to have the educators and parents use the same materials and methods to teach each child.

- 6. Cultural awareness workshops should be offered to professionals on a continual basis. Instead of only identifying the common characteristics of each cultural subgroup, the workshops should focus on the challenges professionals face when working with CLD families and how to address them. Professionals should be aware that what seems common behavior in the dominant culture can be offensive in another culture.
- 7. Schools should also consider collaborating with local community agencies that offer workshops or trainings that can educate CLD families of children with disabilities regarding the special education system and current teaching practices.


Figure 1. Sample daily progress report template.

Date: _____


Today, Jane went to



(Speech therapy) and worked on _____.




(Physical therapy) and worked on _____.




(Occupational therapy) and worked on _____.


In the classroom, we worked on the following:




_____.




_____.



_____.



_____.



_____.

Additional Comments:

Completed by: _____ (Classroom Teacher/Teacher Assistant)

References

- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Chan, S., & Lee, E. (2004). Families with Asian roots. In E. W. Lynch & M. J. Hanson (Eds.), *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children with their families* (3rd ed., pp. 219-298). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2000). Connecting home, school, and community: New directions for social research. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of education* (pp. 285-306). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Flett, A., & Conderman, G. (2001). 20 ways to enhance the involvement of parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 37, 53-55.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Harry, B. (1992). An ethnographic study of cross-cultural communication with Puerto Rican-American families in the special education system. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 471-494.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hughes, M. T., Valle-Riestra, D. M., & Arguelles, M. E. (2002). Experiences of Latino families with their child's special education program. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4, 11-17.
- Hyun, J. K., & Fowler, S. A. (1995). Respect, cultural sensitivity, and communication: Promoting participation by Asian families in the individualized family service plan. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 28, 25-28.
- Jordan, L., Reyes-Blanes, M. E., Peel, B. B., Peel, H. A., & Lane H. B. (1998). Developing teacher-parent partnerships across cultures: Effective parent conferences. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 33, 141-147.
- Lian, M. J., & Fontànez-Phelan, S. M. (2001). Perceptions of Latino parents regarding cultural and linguistic issues and advocacy for children with disabilities. *The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26, 189-194.
- Lynch, E. W., & Hanson, M. J. (2004). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families* (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2007). *Education laws and regulations: Special education*. Retrieved March 20, 2008, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html>
- Mitchell, M., & Jolley, J. (2001). *Research design explained*. Stamford, CT: Wadsworth.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Table 2. Public school student membership, by race/ethnicity and state or jurisdiction: School year 2005-06*. Retrieved February 23, 2008, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/pesenroll06/tables/table_2.asp
- Park, J., Turnbull, A. P., & Park, H. S. (2001). Quality of partnerships in service provision for Korean American parents of children with disabilities: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26, 158-170.
- Peña, D. C. (2000). Parent involvement: Influencing factors and implications. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94, 42-54.
- Pruitt, P., Wandry, D., & Hollums, D. (1998). Listen to us! Parents speak out about their interactions with special educators. *Preventing School Failure*, 42, 161-166.

- Smalley, S. Y., & Reyes-Blanes, M. E. (2001). *Lessons learned: Effective strategies for partnering with rural African-American parents*. San Diego, CA: Growing Partnerships for Rural Special Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED453029)
- Strizek, G. A., Pittsonberger, J. L., Riordan, K. E., Lyter, D. M., & Orlofsky, G. F. (2006). *Characteristics of schools, districts, teachers, principals, and school libraries in the United States: 2003-04 schools and staffing survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Tellier-Robinson, D. (2000). Involvement of Portuguese-speaking parents in the education of their special-needs children. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 24, 225-239.
- Torres-Burgo, N., Reyes-Wasson, P., & Brusca-Vega, R. (1999). Perceptions and needs of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents of children receiving learning disabilities services. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 23, 319-333.
- University of Florida. (2003). *Percent of service providers from different racial groups, by type of service provider*. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from http://ferdig.coe.ufl.edu/spense/scripts/tables/htdocs/Table1_4.htm
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). *Race and ethnicity*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFPeople?_submenuId=people_10&sse=on
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau. (2005). *Population estimates*. Retrieved July 23, 2007, from <http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. (2005). *27th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2007). *Table B2C. Number and percent of population served, by race/ethnicity and age group (3-21, 3-5, and 6-21): 1998 through 2005*. Retrieved February 23, 2008, from https://www.ideadata.org/arc_toc7.asp#partbCC
- Voltz, D. L. (1994). Developing collaborative parent-teacher relationships with culturally diverse parents. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 29, 288-291.
- Yang, L. Y., Ding, Y., & Chang, P. N. (2007, June). *A glance at special education services in post-Mao China*. Paper presented at the 10th Biennial International Conference of the International Association of Special Education, Hong Kong, China.
- Zetlin, A. G., Padron, M., & Wilson, S. (1996). The experience of five Latin American families with the special education system. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 31, 22-28.
- Zionts, L. T., Zionts, P., Harrison, S., & Bellinger, O. (2003). Urban African American families' perceptions of cultural sensitivity within the special education system. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 18, 41-50.

Lusa Lo is an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research interests include assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, family-school-community partnerships, and the overrepresentation of students of color in special education. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Lusa Lo, University of Massachusetts Boston, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA, 02125.

From Mao to Memphis: Chinese Immigrant Fathers' Involvement with Their Children's Education

Alan Klein

Abstract

How do adults adapt when they have been inculcated into a particular philosophy of parenting and education and are then expected to adjust to a cultural framework possibly at odds with their worldview? Mainland Chinese fathers represent one immigrant group that has had to successfully learn to navigate various challenges while interacting with their children and the American K-12 educational system. This case study explores the issue of fathers and their children through interviews with five men from Mainland China. The article first highlights the most common concerns expressed by Chinese families toward American schools and details how the fathers in this study developed specific strategies to address similar worries. The findings then focus on the concept of parental involvement in children's education through the fathers' perspective and how it might diverge from a more traditional view of involvement held by some educators. Implications for strengthening cross-cultural awareness between families and schools are discussed.

Key Words: Chinese immigrant parents, Asian, fathers, schools, cross-cultural awareness, home practices, intercultural competence, parental beliefs, involvement, school-home communication, relationships, worldview, education

Introduction

Recent research studying the cross-cultural aspects of parental involvement, such as the Bridging Cultures Project (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003), has provided guidance as to how schools can better understand the diverse communities that they serve. The case studies documented in this article were initiated because of a dilemma that occurred concerning Mainland Chinese¹ immigrant parents and the schools their children attend in Memphis, Tennessee. Adults who seemed to be having few major problems adapting cross-culturally in their own academic or work lives appeared frustrated concerning their children's education in American schools (Klein, 2004).

In prescient work now almost two generations old, Gordon (1964) comments that public schools and the mass media exert "overwhelming acculturative powers" over immigrant children (pp. 244-245). How much stronger have these influences become in our digital era, and did the Chinese parents feel that they were "losing" their daughters and sons due to these acculturative pressures? Why did teachers also begin to express aggravation at the demands made by some of the Chinese parents? The cultural gap that seemed to exist between the parents and the schools was both intriguing and disheartening. The question then arose: What would it take for Chinese immigrant parents, and specifically fathers, to adapt, cross-culturally, to the new realities that they encountered when dealing with their children's education?

This study began with the premise that parents are rightfully protective of their children and feel that any dangers, including cultural variances, must be minimized. With that in mind, an inquiry ensued into how fathers learned to adjust to a new worldview concerning the parenting and education of their children.

The purpose of this article, then, is to explore the experiences of five immigrant fathers from Mainland China as they interact with their children as well as the American K-12 educational system. Through these various interactions, the fathers demonstrate concern for their children's education and display high levels of parental involvement with their children, even though this participation might not be what the educational system has traditionally viewed as parental engagement. This exploratory study also has the broader goal of opening up the discourse concerning a rarely discussed group, immigrant fathers, in their children's education. The findings from this research, which are based on an atypical cohort, are not to be taken as conclusive.

Theoretical Framework

Because the topic of parenting is so expansive, this analysis concentrates on the cross-cultural context of parenting behaviors that are highlighted in this study and the attendant changes that have occurred. However, before presenting those findings, an explanation is given concerning the meaning of the terms “intercultural competence” and “worldview,” and a brief overview of traditional parenting roles in China is offered. It is also essential to comment on the impact of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese society. The topic of Chinese immigrant parenting styles is then mentioned, and the section concludes with a general overview of Chinese immigrants’ involvement in the schools.

It is important to clarify that Asians are not a monolithic cultural group. They are categorized in the literature into three major subgroups based on family origin: East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), Southeast Asian, and South Asian. Although Japan and Korea have their own cultural identities, and the Chinese can be further divided into geographic subgroups from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, East Asians do share common beliefs concerning the primary role of parenting in their children’s educational achievement (Chao & Tseng, 2002).

Intercultural Competence

Research into cross-cultural relocations by sojourners, refugees, or immigrants has been explored using various terminologies: intercultural competence, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, and intercultural communicative competence (Fantini, 2000; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Kim, 1995). Fantini clarifies that, regardless of label, three primary themes concerning intercultural competence have emerged from the literature highlighting the ability: (a) “to develop and maintain relationships,” (b) “to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion,” and (c) “to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others” (p. 27). The author comments that, although these abilities are equally appropriate in all interpersonal relationships, interacting across cultures complicates the communication and noticeably increases differences. These distinctions are created by disparities in language, culture, and worldview.

Worldview

Worldview is a fundamental concept succinctly defined by McKenzie (1991) as the “contemplation of the world” (p. 1). Within that statement, however, *world* is used in its most inclusive sense, comprising not only a physical realm, but also the views of others and one’s own subjectivity. The author continues

that the world “takes on a definite texture and coloration in that I project upon it some features in my very act of viewing or interpreting” (p. 5). In other words, our personal worldviews are shaped by our interpretations, which we arrive at after reflecting upon our daily interactions.

Relevant to this study, the participants’ lives in China, their subsequent immigration and adjustment to life in the United States, and lastly, their experiences of making sense of school life and parenting practices have all combined to inform their worldviews. An important aspect of that worldview is what it means for them to be fathers in this society.

Traditional Parenting Roles for Fathers in China

Customary parenting roles in China have followed the traditional maxim, “strict father, kind mother,” creating an environment in which mothers indulge and fathers control their children (Berndt, Cheung, Lau, Hau, & Lew, 1993; Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, Solomon (1971) points out that in the past, even with a rigid division of parenting roles based on gender, many Chinese fathers felt strong emotions toward their children.

In any case, both Chinese mothers and fathers regard child rearing as a responsibility of supreme importance in their lives (Xie & Hultgren, 1994). Xie, Seefeldt, and Tam (1996) state that a primary Confucian proverb concerning parenting is that “Bearing a child without training is the failure of his father” (p. 8). The authors remark that even with a modern interpretation of this statement emphasizing the role of both mothers and fathers, parents still bear total responsibility for their children’s failures. In contrast, the accomplishments of their children bring great honor to the whole family.

The Cultural Revolution

Traditional Chinese parenting roles were radically altered by the events taking place during the Cultural Revolution. Mainland Chinese adults who lived through this time experienced a remarkable period in human history, in both its intensity and ferocity. This episode has been vividly recorded in Chinese films, such as *The Blue Kite* (Tian, 1993) and *To Live* (Zhang, 1994). While watching these, it is impossible not to be swept up in the complexity of emotions, ranging from fascination to repulsion, that characterize Chinese history between 1966 and 1976.

While in 1968 Americans were shocked by the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy and students in this country were protesting the Vietnam War on college campuses, in China Mao Zedong was initiating another form of revolution: the “send-down” policy. Over a 12-year period, more than 17 million urban youth had their school careers interrupted

and were relocated to the countryside to partake in farm labor. Chairman Mao envisioned that rural peasants would reeducate the children of the cities about the true meaning of socialism (Zhou & Hou, 1999).

According to Zhou and Hou (1999), the send-down policy was part of a larger social experiment, formally known as The Great Cultural Revolution, which altered Chinese society at its core. Most educational and governmental agencies stopped operating, and the lack of industrial growth created serious concerns about unemployment. Against this backdrop, the five participants in the study were either beginning or well into their studies in Chinese public schools. The Cultural Revolution was clearly the external catalyst that most strongly affected these individuals and their subsequent life decisions.

Chinese Immigrant Parenting Styles

Some research has been conducted on studying parenting behaviors of Chinese immigrant families living in the United States. The work has been generally conducted as either focusing solely on mothers or comparative research of fathers' and mothers' parental attitudes. Much debate concerns the comparison of the Western notion of authoritarian parenting to two interwoven Chinese concepts of *guan* and *jiaoxun* [*chiao shun*]² (Chao, 1994; Li, 2006). *Guan* is an expectation that parents will conscientiously govern their children, and that without *guan*, parents would be viewed by others as derelict and uncaring in their parenting responsibilities (Li; Chao & Tseng, 2002). *Chiao shun* encompasses the idea of "training" children in acceptable behaviors. It does include some aspects of authoritarian parenting style, including the emphasis on compliance, which Chao (2000) points out as a reason Chinese Americans may score high on scales of authoritarian parenting. Ultimately, Chao (1994) concludes that both *guan* and *chiao shun* are "indigenous concepts" (p. 1113) that more adequately describe Chinese parenting and form part of a set of behaviors reinforced by both parents and the broader community. However, the rationale for these standards is not based on a Western model of authoritarian dominance but, instead, on a desire to strengthen the organizational structure of the family.

In another study of cross-cultural parenting, Gorman (1998) finds that, contrary to a popular belief regarding "authoritarian" aspects of Chinese parenting, Western constructs of parenting may not accurately "depict Chinese socialization" (p. 73). The immigrant mothers participating in the study expressed high expectations for their children to succeed and become "good people" but also articulated concerns "about the negative impact of American society" (pp. 73, 75). Additionally, many participants were anxious about their children's failure to respect Chinese traditions, such as valuing Chinese history and showing deference to parents and teachers.

While the studies mentioned are only a representative sample of the research being conducted on parenting, it is clear that little has been written exclusively concerning the role of immigrant fathers, specifically those from China, in the lives of their children. However, the immigrant Chinese fathers in this study demonstrated strong parental involvement, which made their interactions with their children noteworthy.

Chinese Immigrant Parental Involvement in American Schools

A comment must be made concerning the cultural differences inherent in parental involvement in the schools. Educational researchers have identified parent involvement as a key ingredient in the effectiveness of schools, and it has been clearly established that children do better academically when parents support their school's activities (Epstein, 1987). In spite of this widespread agreement, Lee (1995) comments that, in general, Asian immigrant parents do not know how to participate actively in their children's school pursuits. Additionally, the author points out that many teachers also do not understand how to involve Asian parents as educational partners.

However, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define parent involvement in a more textured and multidimensional fashion than that normally perceived by educators. They discuss three domains for the involvement of parents in their children's education: (a) parent behavior – participating in school activities; (b) personal involvement – supporting a child's affective environment; and (c) intellectual involvement – exposing the child to cognitively stimulating activities. Using this expanded set of criteria, Huntsinger, Krieg, and Jose (1998) found in their comparative study of Chinese and European American parents and their children that 37% of the variance in Chinese American children's school performance was predicted by variables of their parents' involvement. The strongest correlation was in the area of cognitive and intellectual commitment.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) found that the more time the child spends on homework, either assigned by the school or parent, the higher the teachers rate the child's academic performance. Likewise, Henderson and Mapp (2002), in a meta-analysis of the literature on parental involvement, found that academically based parent involvement *at home* is the strongest predictor for a student's math and reading success.

Chao (1996) details cultural differences between immigrant Chinese and European American mothers concerning their roles in promoting school success for their children. Fundamentally, the European American mothers' attitudes in the author's study reflected the prevailing feelings about best practices in American primary education. These included emphasizing both the cognitive and affective domains of human development within the classroom (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

It was evident from Chao's (1996) research that Chinese mothers, who generally start teaching their children before they enter school, placed a much higher priority on rigorous academics than the European American participants. When I presented these findings to parents at a workshop at a Chinese language school in Memphis, two reactions were evident: (a) parents were both surprised at the cultural distance in parental values about education between themselves and American families, and (b) they felt at least some frustration with the education their children were receiving.

In essence, while European American parents are more likely to be involved in school activities, Chinese families are highly involved in their children's education in a fashion that might not be recognized by the schools. The topic of the parental involvement of the Chinese fathers with their children will be discussed in more depth later in this article.

Methodology

Context of the Study

The Chinese community has become a permanent part of Memphis' cultural mosaic, which has expanded in recent years beyond the traditional boundaries of African and European Americans. Even though the Chinese/Taiwanese population in the greater Memphis area is growing, it is still quite small, estimated at 5,500³ people, or approximately .0055% of all residents. In comparison, a similar demographic in San Francisco represents 20% of the city's total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As their community continues to grow, more middle-class Chinese immigrant parents are now having contact with the public schools in the Memphis metropolitan region. This coincides with a national trend in which these families are coming to the United States bringing "resources – financial capital, training, and education" (Li, 2006, p. 28). While earlier generations of Chinese immigrants would settle in "urban ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown" (Li, p. 28), newer middle-class immigrants are moving to the suburbs and interacting with their neighborhood schools. This brings new opportunities and challenges for teachers working in suburban settings who are expected to respond appropriately to culturally and linguistically diverse families living within their communities.

The Researcher

At first, I might seem like an unlikely candidate for doing research about the experiences of Chinese fathers. I am a European American, non-Chinese speaker, who is not a father. Additionally, although I had been to China on

two separate occasions, I was by no means an expert on either Chinese history or culture. However, in my 25 years as an educator and researcher, what has motivated me are two ideals that I believe in passionately: supporting equity education, and strengthening my own intercultural competence.

The issue of the relationship between researcher and participants, especially in cross-cultural situations, must be addressed directly. Banks (1998) discusses the question of “positionality” when referring to the insider versus outsider status of a researcher, and Merriam et al. (2001) comment that positionality is determined “by where one stands in relation to the ‘other’” (p. 411). An external-outsider is an individual who is “socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research” (Banks, p. 8). Because I had an external-outsider relationship to the members of the Memphis Chinese community, which was reinforced by my inability to speak Chinese, the best opportunity I had in attempting to bridge the cultural divide was to become a participant observer, a traditional method used in ethnography. This entailed spending large amounts of time and taking part in activities at the local Chinese language school where I presented Chao’s (1996) findings and would eventually conduct the research. Rubin and Rubin (1995) remark, “To learn a culture, an interviewer doesn’t necessarily need to become an insider but must be allowed to cross the boundary and become accepted as one who can be taught” (p. 171).

In order to attain that acceptance, I visited the school on numerous occasions over a period of nine months. My goal was to build beginning relationships with parents based on trust and mutual interests, especially the academic well-being of their children. There were few non-Chinese members of the school community, so at first my presence as a European American male was novel. However, it was important to me to go beyond the stage of being a “guest,” so I attempted to become less of an “outsider.” Approximately 120 students and 50 parents attended the school every Sunday afternoon. While the children were with their teachers, the parents had options for interacting with other adults, such as weekly organized basketball, badminton, and ping-pong games. Occasionally, small groups of parents would also talk informally in the hallways. However, the conversations often took place in Chinese, which precluded me from attempting to socialize. I became concerned that I would not, ultimately, build the level of confidence and rapport needed when I eventually asked parents to participate in my study.

In spring 2002, the school introduced a weekly adult-level class in Tai Chi. I enrolled and became the only non-Chinese participant in the group, where, because several of the older students did not speak English, all instruction was in Chinese. While at first this was daunting, soon other participants offered to

translate when I had a question. I attended the class not only because I enjoyed both the physical and mental exercise but also as a mechanism to interact with others. I wanted the parents who had attended my workshop earlier in the school year not only to see me as the "expert" in education but also as a novice in other areas of adult learning. Happily, my interactions with parents in the hallways after the Tai Chi class increased and became more informal.

Participants

Possible participants for this study were identified among the adults who had children attending the Chinese language school. I chose to concentrate my research on the fathers' perspectives about parenting and education because of their high level of involvement in the school. An observation made while I was a participant observer was that approximately 40% of the adults who came weekly to spend time at the Chinese school were fathers, and 5 of the 12 PTA members from the school were male. This appeared to be a much higher level of participation by fathers in a weekend program than would normally occur with their American counterparts. Informally, I asked several men who attended regularly their reasons for doing so and received a variation of the same answer: "Because it's my duty." This consistent response seemed positive and worth exploring further.

Five fathers were selected who met the following major criteria: (a) they had resided in the United States for at least 4 years; (b) they had children attending American schools, regardless of grade, for a minimum of 4 years; and (c) they could communicate proficiently in English about deeply held beliefs concerning parenting and education.

The five fathers participating in the study represented a purposeful sample, which Patton (2002) refers to as those individuals having knowledge critical to the intention of the research. The men, Albert, Bob, David, Dewey, and Frank,⁴ provided information-rich cases to draw upon. Because the focus was on the adults' perspective, no children were interviewed. It also must be noted that the goal of this article was not to compare life in Chinese schools in the 1970s, which was greatly impacted by the Cultural Revolution, to the education system in China today. The scope of research was limited to comparing the fathers' experiences as students in China to their children's current education in American schools.

Each father was born in China and finished his public secondary school and university undergraduate education there. Two of the men were from Beijing; one came from a medium-sized city in the far north, Harbin; and 2 were from villages south of Shanghai. The men's ages ranged from 38 to 45, and their length of residence in the United States varied from 4 to 16 years. Two of the

fathers completed degrees at the master's level and 3 had doctoral degrees. In addition, 2 men came to the United States for work-related reasons, while 3 arrived to pursue advanced degrees. All the men were working in Memphis, either as medical researchers or as computer professionals (see Table 1).

Table 1: Fathers' Information

Name	Age	Participant's Birthplace in China	Married in U.S. or China	Educational Attainment	Year of Arrival in U.S.	Reason for Coming to U.S.
Albert	40	Harbin	China	M.D. & Ph.D. Child Nutrition	1992	Work
Bob	44	Beijing	China	Ph.D. Electrical Engineering	1991	Graduate School
David	45	Hunan Province	China	M.S. Exercise Science & M.S. Computers	1993	Graduate School
Dewey	38	Beijing	U.S.	M.S. Computer Science	1986	Graduate School
Frank	38	Jiangxi Province	China	M.D. & Ph.D. Pharmacology	1998	Work

The five fathers had a total of 10 children, 7 girls and 3 boys. Four of the five fathers had at least two children; one participant had only one child, while another had three. The ages of the children ranged from infancy to age 14, with most between 6 and 12. A majority of the children were still in elementary or middle school, although one father had a daughter attending high school. Table 2 shows the children's information.

Table 2: Children's Information

Father	Gender & Ages of Children	Children's Place of Birth	School Child Attended in China	Current Grade in School in Memphis
Albert	Boy 12 Girl 6	China U.S.	None None	6 th 1 st
Bob	Girl 13	China	Preschool	8 th
David	Girl 14 Boy 7 Girl 4	China U.S. U.S.	Preschool None None	9 th 2 nd Preschool
Dewey	Girl 9 Girl 7	U.S. U.S.	None None	4 th 2 nd
Frank	Girl 11 Boy Infant	China U.S.	Preschool	5 th

Data Collection and Analysis

In addition to participant observations, semi-structured, audiotaped, individual interviews with the fathers were conducted over the course of the 2002-2003 school year. The interviews with the men were held on the school site while the children were attending classes. Each participant was interviewed over a period of 4 to 5 hours, in at least 3 sessions. These interviews generated approximately 25 hours of audiotapes. In completing the research, it was important to follow a standard qualitative format as outlined by Patton (2002). This included first creating an interview framework to map the phenomenon and then developing an interview guide consisting of a series of standardized, open-ended questions (the interview guide is available from the author upon request).

The process of content analysis, which includes the coding and categorizing of data from the interviews, is part of the analytic procedures of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss (1987) refers to coding as an activity to "fracture" the data to make possible the comparison of the information within and between meaning-based categories (p. 29). To facilitate the management and analysis of the data, which was embedded in 350 pages of transcripts, the software program, The Ethnograph, Version 5.0, was used (Seidel, 1998).

The next step in the analytical process, categorizing, captures the recurring patterns inherent in the data (Merriam, 1998). Building categories indigenous to the data collected in the interviews allowed for an understanding of the experience of the fathers without reference to any preconceived theory. This made it easier to concentrate on the participants' knowledge of their parenting skills and the meanings they attached to these phenomena.

The Fathers and Their Children

Early in the interview with Frank, he was asked to explain the beliefs that he held about parenting when he was still living in China. He mentioned that, because he was a new father, he learned much from both his parents and his in-laws. However, the following quotation leads one to believe that strong cultural traditions also guided him in prioritizing his parental responsibilities:

Chinese parents, they usually are very responsible for their kids, but for their children's future, including education, career, what kind of a job they will get. So, Chinese parents consider more about that...even consider their children more than themselves sometimes.⁵

Frank's comments appeared to represent a widespread feeling among the participants concerning their role as fathers. These beliefs had been carried over

as part of their immigrant experience and strongly influenced the challenges for them of adapting to an educational system that was possibly at odds with their native values.

Siu (1996, p. 8) states in her research that the four most frequent concerns that Chinese immigrant families express about their schools are: (a) lax discipline, (b) insufficient homework, (c) lack of moral education, and (d) poor mathematics training. In the course of this study, the first three issues commented upon by Siu created anxiety for the five fathers. The topic of poor mathematics training was not discussed at any length by the participants during the interviews. The question that arises then is, "How did these fathers develop strategies to overcome their concerns?" To respond to this query, a focus on the general methods that the fathers used to build a better understanding of the American educational system will be presented. Siu's specific areas of concern will be addressed in the second part of this section.

Fathers Gather Information About the Schools

Information about American education that would come naturally to a parent who was native-born and attended schools in the U.S. has to be consciously acquired by immigrants. The fathers in this study referred to different methods they used to gain the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. Both Dewey and David specifically commented on the valuable data they received from their children. Dewey occasionally checked in with his daughters to find out how their teachers organized the classrooms and also gathered information from other parents and teachers when his children got a new instructor. David mentioned that there was a variety of ways that he found out about the schools. He sometimes had informal discussions about education issues with American families at his church and also enjoyed attending parenting seminars. Incidentally, David was the only participant to discuss the importance of religion in his daily life. While some fathers found it helpful talking to other Chinese families, Bob expressed a sentiment felt by other participants.

Yeah, things that we learned, I think a lot is from American parents. Pretty much Chinese parents, you know, I think they're in the same situation as us. We want to learn how [you] can adjust to the American system. So the Chinese parents may just [be] in the same situation as I.

To highlight this point, Bob relayed a story about the precise information he learned from Americans who were parents of his daughter's friends. In one case, they told him that he could request a particular teacher for his child.

At the beginning we don't know, but when we've talked to other parents then they tell us you can do this. If you like some teachers [that] you

believe will be better for your kid, you can write a letter suggest your child in that class. If [the] school takes this [into] consideration, if nobody other cares, then you can get it. So, that things we learned.

David also explained that he gained understanding about the American educational system by reading books and by looking at the materials sent by the teachers. He especially focused on and found helpful the class rules sent home, which detailed the behaviors expected of his children, the consequences for infractions, as well as his parental responsibilities. For example, David learned about the discipline process of "time out" when his young son demonstrated it for him at home. However, when asked if he turned to any other Chinese parents to answer education-related questions, he said, "No, I ask my daughter [in high school]...If I have any questions, I just ask my daughter. My daughter give me every answer."

Adelman, Parks, and Albrecht (1987) refer to the concept of "weak ties" in relation to the network of "informal sources of support found within the community" (p. 127). These relationships serve a valuable role when stronger ties to family and friends are not available. Additionally, when stronger ties are not the most appropriate sources from which to gather information, weaker ties, such as teachers, landlords, and acquaintances, are the people to whom immigrants will turn for advice.

An example of one of the participants utilizing weak ties is Frank's decision, shortly after his arrival in the United States, to seek input on parenting from some American colleagues: "One of them is a doctor....He has two sons who are in the colleges. They have a very good relationship. Not the Hollywood movie shows that the parent and kids have intense [conflictive] relationships." I asked Frank if he had any actual conversations with his friend about raising children. He replied that he did not but that he respected his friend's style of parenting and learned from him by watching his actions.

What became clear during discussions of information gathering was that, regardless of the method used, the fathers found it important to actively learn about the educational system. By so doing they felt they could become more knowledgeable and effective in helping their children succeed.

Interactions with Teachers

Parental interactions with teachers mainly centered on the yearly conferences that the parents attended. And while all the fathers were happy to have a chance to meet with their children's teachers, Dewey expressed a common sentiment that during their 15-minute slots they generally only heard that their children were "great students." What he hoped for was to find out "what subject she's not doing so great...where to continue to excel, or be challenged

more.” He added, “I guess to look for the next level. I don’t see, I don’t hear a lot of that.” In fact, Dewey laughed when he talked about a conference he had previously experienced with his younger daughter’s teacher:

I usually pay a great deal of attention to her [daughter] because I know she’s not as conscientious as the other girl. But when I was at school, I was, you know, get all positive feedback. I sometimes don’t recognize my own child.

Dewey’s comments coincide with Siu’s (1996) findings that Chinese American parents “prefer more frequent, direct, specific feedback rather than the general, ‘She is doing okay’ or ‘Everything is fine with him’” (p. 8).

Frank’s recollections were of conferences in China in which many parents would come to the class and the teacher would talk to all of them at one time. However, he enjoyed the one-on-one conferences that he had attended in the U.S. because the teachers focused on the positive aspects of their children’s behavior. “The teachers seldom talk about the bad things with the kids’ parents.” He saw this as positive behavior by the teachers, not as an isolated event but as a pattern of how “the teachers take care of the students in the schools.”

Finally, David expressed a concern about his own level of English as a barrier in communicating with the teachers. That appeared to be an honest assessment, because, of the five participants, David had the weakest ability to communicate fully in English. This appeared to create a lack of linguistic confidence for David. Nevertheless, what was important to him at a conference was to hear from the teacher how he, as a parent, could be most effective at home, both academically and socially, in helping his children succeed.

Interactions with Other Parents

As commented on in the previous section about gathering information, fathers did interact with other families, especially Americans, although possibly in a perfunctory manner. However, stories from two fathers – the first concerning interacting with Americans, the second about cooperating with other immigrants – highlight the powerful influence of parents collaborating.

Bob’s contact with other families often concerned his daughter’s involvement in academic competitions. A major event occurred when she was chosen as a Tennessee representative in a national history fair, and the family traveled to Washington, D.C. with another couple whose daughter was also competing. He confirmed that his wife had previously had more contact with American families and that this was his first experience having in-depth involvement with other parents from the school. He mentioned that this collaboration started before the trip by talking and sharing ideas on how to help their children study history. Then, during the visit, the families went sightseeing together.

After discussing the trip with Bob, he commented that he might have learned as much from this experience as his daughter. He said, "Yeah, during that week we traveled a lot, so we have lot of opportunity to talk. You know, you don't have a lot of opportunities here to meet a lot of parents during the school hours."

When asked the same question about involvement with other parents, Frank responded that his contact had mainly been with immigrant parents, primarily from India, who also sent their children to the elementary school his daughter attended. He believed that in comparison to American households, Chinese and Indian families shared comparable values about the importance of education. I asked Frank if that connection surprised him.

Frank: No, not really. I was surprised because Indian people, they speak English. They don't have language problem like we have here. So, theoretically, they don't have any barrier to communicate with American people. But, as I know, they also feel like they have some distance from American people, and I don't know why. And they feel it's more, it's easier to communicate with Chinese people, or people from Cambodia, even though their English is not good.

Alan: So it's not the language that is a barrier?

Frank: Yeah, I think it's the culture, the culture.

Although Frank said that, in general, American families wanted their children to attend good colleges, he believed that fundamentally, "If their children don't want to, that's okay, maybe. Some American parents don't quite care about the grade, their children's grades in schools." However, the fact that Chinese and Indian families place a premium on their children's academic success is a critical value that deeply connects these two distinct cultures.

School Discipline

School discipline, the first of the specific concerns commented upon by Siu (1996), is an area in which the participants' responses challenged the prevailing assumptions of Chinese fathers taking a "hard line" on discipline. The participants did express a standard expectation that all children, including theirs, should behave well at school. Albert noted that the principal of a school establishes the tone for students' observing the rules, and that he wanted the educational leader to create the safest possible environment for his children. He commented favorably on one of his son's previous principals: "He is just very strong, very strong. I think he just showed power, he can control the students....The students can, will control themselves by the influence of the principal."

However, the fathers' concept of discipline was also broader and less intrusive and more often led to the goal of self-discipline. Frank expressed a common view of the group when he stated:

Yeah, I really hope school can discipline the kids, including my daughter, to help them build up better behavior, good behavior; teach them to be polite, to be respectful to other people, and to put things organized in good order. That's good behavior, and that's good for the kids.

It appears that the idea of the participants taking a "softer approach" to school discipline developed over a period of time, mainly as a reaction to their experiences either in the United States or while as students in China. Dewey mentioned that he had attended a school in China with 40-50 students per class and that Chinese discipline was strict. The classroom structure provided little or no opportunity for interaction with others. David concurred, "In China, you cannot chat, talk in class. You cannot move from here to there." Bob demonstrated how he and his classmates were not allowed to sit freely in class but were expected to sit with their hands behind their backs when not working. Both Bob and Frank remembered teachers shouting at or criticizing individual students as a form of punishment.

Ultimately, based on positive comments they had received from their children's teachers, none of the fathers felt any reason to be concerned about issues of classroom behavior. For them, ensuring that their children learned to become self-disciplined was a more critical matter. Dewey expressed an opinion about discipline that also represented the feelings of the other participants.

My definition of discipline would be like every day do they do their homework...? I guess, do they fulfill their responsibility as expected... that's what I see as not just in addition to being a good student, not making trouble, but also discipline-wise, do things right the first time.

Homework

The fathers expressed strong and nearly unanimous feelings about the quantity and quality of homework that their children were bringing home. Almost all believed that there was not enough homework given, especially in comparison to their recollections of the amount of work they were assigned as high school students in China. However, they talked about differences in their children's homework depending on the age of the child and the philosophy and training of the teacher.

Dewey was surprised and disappointed that it took only 10 or 15 minutes for his elementary-aged children to complete their assignments. Additionally, he was concerned that "it's very multiple question kind of thing. It doesn't really encourage learning more about a particular subject."

Along with complaints about the quantity of homework assigned, Albert also raised a concern about homework emphasizing short-term memorization. He believed that the homework that his 6th-grade son was doing should “teach the students to understand and use the concept to solve other problems. I think it should be part of their logical thinking.”

Although the fathers criticized aspects of the assignments that were brought home and supplemented the work when they felt it was inadequate, there were also several compliments concerning their children's involvement with project-based homework. Frank gave an example of a project that his elementary-aged daughter created on New York (before September 11, 2001) in which she built a three-dimensional representation of the World Trade Center and the Statue of Liberty. He was impressed with the work that she did, including the written description of the material and her presentation to the class. When Frank was asked what he thought was the greatest benefit of this type of work, he commented, “She learns things through using, through application.” He also mentioned that this type of learning was new for him, something that he had never seen in China.

Other participants echoed Frank's enthusiasm for project-based learning and remarked on the life skills their children were acquiring. Bob remarked on how projects that his 13-year-old daughter was doing resembled his work situation.

The benefit of the project is that in the real world you face the same way; you need to do a project. Trying to just accomplish the things, not just follow one rule. You have to gather data, gather information, then you can organize those things, then you have [to] write things.

While the fathers expressed concerns about their children wasting too much time watching television instead of doing homework, they acknowledged that some American parents may have different views about homework. Dewey remarked, “Every parent has a different situation, a different availability of time. Personally, I want to spend some more time with the kids helping them if they need help.”

In addition, Dewey commented that he was often amazed at the content of the work that his elementary-aged children brought home. For instance, during the Thanksgiving season, he thought to himself, “This is what I would have learned if I were born here.” This information gave him valuable cultural insights which, in turn, strengthened his intercultural competence.

The following comments made by the fathers demonstrate an appreciation and integration of both Chinese and American values toward education. During the conversation about homework, Bob remarked that he believed that it was necessary to find a balance, a “proper way” between the lack of mastery of

fundamental knowledge prevalent in the American education system and the emphasis on repetition inherent in Chinese schools. Albert concurred that the Chinese system is strong in stressing the acquisition of basic skills, as evidenced by results of international math competitions. Nevertheless, he stated that the Chinese students' high test scores are derived from long hours in the classroom and homework that lasts late into the night. He saw Chinese society on the whole as producing good students, but at the expense of focusing solely on information derived from textbooks. Additionally, the lack of free time to pursue other interests inhibits children from developing other talents. "You may miss something, because the genius is not generated from the textbook." However, Albert did see American schools as being more balanced. "The system here, it just give you every chance you want. You may not have a very good score [in] the school, but you have other talent. So you can contribute to the society."

Moral Education

The third concern of Chinese parents discussed by Siu (1996) is that of the lack of moral education taught in the schools. Two prominent aspects of Confucianism, *zuoren* and *zhi*, will be discussed within in this section. Pratt (1991) remarks that a person's identity in China has traditionally been intimately associated with Confucian cultural values concerning family relationships. Hsu (1985) describes the Confucian concept of *jen* [ren] as an "individual's transactions with his [sic] fellow human beings" (p. 33).

Ren is a major cornerstone of Confucian thought because it refers to the idea of "human-heartedness" (Thompson, 1996, p. 13). Wu (1996) comments, "A person by nature does not become an acceptable human being unless educated through deliberate efforts. The emphasis is placed both on parental responsibility for instruction and the child's responsibility for learning about the way of becoming human, or *zuoren*" (p. 144). Thompson remarks that the teachings of Confucius stressed, along with *ren*, and its derivative, *zuoren*, virtues shared by Western morality: righteousness, loyalty, modesty, and frugality.

The fathers explained during the interviews what *zuoren* meant to them. All the participants responded to the concept of *zuoren* with favorable regard. Frank was asked what he thought was the single best thing he could do to help his daughter succeed in school, besides assisting with homework. He replied, "I think it's teach her to *zuoren*; teach her how to become a good human being." When Dewey was asked what he thought American educators could learn from the Chinese system, he responded that it is the values inherent in *zuoren* that are instilled in Chinese teaching. He added that it is possible to find these precepts woven into the language and literature of the society, which "teaches the value of the culture."

The fathers also maintained *chih* [zhi], another cornerstone of Confucian thought, which represents a traditional Chinese cultural regard toward education (Yum, 1988). Confucius' view of human nature leaned heavily toward the primary role of environmental influences in shaping human development, which inclined him "to take the nurture side in the nature-nurture debate" (Lee, 1996, p. 29). The Confucian philosopher Mencius, c. 390-305 BCE, felt even more strongly about the influence of the environment, arguing that all humans were capable of being educated. From that notion came the Chinese premise that "everyone can become a sage" (Lee, p. 29).

David relayed a story about an interaction he had with his daughter that highlights the Chinese emphasis on *zhi* and his role as a parent to *zuoren* his daughter. David's daughter was an excellent math student in high school who received high scores on her tests. However, during one assignment she misunderstood the teacher's directions and was given a grade of zero. Other students also found the assignment confusing and were given the same low mark, but the teacher would not alter the scores. David's daughter felt there had been an injustice done and went to her father to intervene. He told her that it would be okay to let this pass because she could catch up and still do well in class:

Even teacher didn't do well...but as a student, you should follow your professor. Follow her standard. I said, "From here, you know you will meet tough teacher, tough professor in the future. You should learn something; you should show defeat in this case."

David was asked to explain what he meant by showing defeat, and he clarified that regardless of the difficulty of the class or the teacher, he wanted his daughter to understand that she could still succeed. "The test is not based on you. It's based on your teacher's standard." She acted on his advice, and by the end of the course, with his assistance, she had improved her final score to what she had originally hoped it would be. David's message to his daughter exemplified Hsu's (1955) critique of the difference between American and Chinese socialization practices. While American children soon realize that their environment caters to them, Chinese children are taught to become sensitive to their surroundings. It appears to be a fundamental difference in worldview.

Becoming Less of a "Stranger"

It is important to discuss the notion of the immigrant fathers' ability to integrate into a new society. The impression given is that the fathers started out feeling like "strangers" when first dealing with the American educational system. Simmel (1908/1950) equates the term stranger with an individual who is simultaneously and contrastingly near and far; it "involves both being outside it [a culture] and confronting it" (pp. 402-403). Schuetz (1960) elaborates on

the concept of living as a stranger by commenting that the historical perspective of the host culture toward the newcomer is limited, at best. There may be a willingness on the part of the host group to share with the immigrant immediate and future encounters, but the individual “remains excluded from such experiences of its [the host culture’s] past. Seen from the point of the view of the approached group, he is a man [sic] without a history” (p. 103).

It appears that the fathers in this study used the coping strategies mentioned earlier in this section to feel less like strangers when dealing with their children’s education. In a final commentary, Dewey had a remarkable insight into how his children’s educational experiences helped him feel more comfortable in his own work environment. He explained that the opportunity to follow his daughters’ education gave him a window of understanding into the motivations of his work colleagues. Dewey commented that his co-workers had educational experiences far more similar to his daughters’ than to his own K-12 experiences in Beijing:

Right, I see them as adults....Okay, but through [my children’s] education, I started seeing, “Wow, I can see them when they’re young. I can see what they have to go through to become what they are today.” Which is quite enhances [my] understanding of my colleagues.

Dewey described that while he was in university in the United States, before having children, he had a limited perspective about how his classmates were raised. “I don’t see their childhood.” On the other hand, the experience of having children in American schools allowed him to watch how his daughters’ teachers interacted with the girls. He saw a general school environment that encouraged children to be creative without placing too much pressure on them. Dewey remarked that his school experiences were the opposite of his daughters’ and that he did not have “a lot of options to explore my own ways of solving problems.”

In effect, his daughters’ education provided him with insights into how children in this culture are socialized to investigate new avenues of learning. He incorporated this information into his own work life, which allowed him to more easily encourage and support his co-workers’ attempts to increase their problem-solving strategies. In addition, Dewey could understand his co-workers’ past, which helped him feel less like a “stranger” in a new culture. He commented that he developed a good reputation as a supervisor who was straightforward with his opinions but considerate of his colleagues’ positions. “[I] Give them space, I guess.”

The Meaning of Parent Involvement

Direct parent involvement, as manifested by the fathers, often included spending time helping their children complete their homework, providing extra assistance in subjects like math and science, and taking them to Chinese language school. Except for parent conferences, the fathers had little actual involvement with the activities occurring at their public schools. This was apparently due to the men's constraints on time and on their perceived language barriers. However, a cultural factor was mentioned that also needs to be considered. Dewey talked about being invited to one of his daughter's classes to discuss the "immigrant experience." No matter how much he enjoyed talking to the children, he did not believe that this was "really getting involved a lot," so he was asked to give his definition of parental involvement. Dewey's reply exemplified the beliefs of all the participants about what they felt their role was in guaranteeing their children's success in school:

I think that parent involvement could be as much as every day ask them how they're doing at school, look at their homework, and ask them if they have any problems or any questions. Make sure that they understand that you do want to hear their problems if they have one. Or you want to share their happiness if they're very successful.

Discussion and Implications

Recent work on parental involvement highlights differences between school and home definitions on what it means to be "involved." There might be a disconnect between immigrant families and the schools' definition of "good" parental involvement. Barton et al. (2004) state that the role parents play in their children's education has largely been defined by "what they do" and how well that fits into the school's objectives (p. 4). The authors prefer to discuss the "ecologies of engagement" (p. 4), which offers a broader picture of parents being engaged with their children. This might not always include active parental participation at the school site. Additionally, the word engagement is used "to expand our understanding of involvement to also include parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do" (p. 4).

Jackson and Remillard (2005) propose an alternative model for parent involvement that is less "schoolcentric" (p. 67). The authors offer a clear differentiation between parental engagement in children's learning and schooling, which is fundamentally parent-based, in comparison to parental involvement in the classroom. Being able to recognize and fully accept the difference between these two perspectives is "critical to understanding parents' potential as intellectual resources for their children" (p. 69).

As mentioned previously, the fathers in this study, on average, did not visit the schools very often, but they all considered themselves highly “engaged” in their children’s education. The men saw themselves as being greatly involved in helping their children maintain daily schedules to build self-discipline. That was how they believed they could best be engaged in their children’s learning and schooling. It would be beneficial for the whole community to have teachers and administrators encourage this type of parental involvement for all families in their schools.

In the interviews with David he commented upon the importance of the notes, class rules, and newsletters sent home by his children’s teachers. He read them carefully and gained knowledge concerning the norms and regulations of American education. David’s interest in these various messages appears to have roots in Chinese traditional values toward learning. Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) remark in a study of Chinese teachers and learners that the written word has a foundational importance in Chinese education. For students in China, the text and the teacher combine to become the most authoritative source of knowledge.

Based on this cultural information, it is not surprising that Chinese parents might place a high value on the written words sent home by teachers. A common complaint heard among K-12 educators is that teachers spend time writing notes and newsletters, but no one seems to be paying attention to them. Although that might be the case in many circumstances, it appears that information in writing is an excellent method of communicating with Chinese families and of informing them about the American educational system.

This information coincides with a recommendation made by Henderson and Mapp (2002) concerning parents’ involvement in their children’s academic success. The authors ask a fundamental question that schools need to address about their current parent engagement program: “How is it linked to learning?” (p. 74). They suggest that all activities and communication with parents have a learning component.

A final comment about parental involvement is in order. Some of the fathers remarked that they had an interest in meeting and talking with American families. However, it may be problematic for some immigrant families to feel comfortable enough to talk about education issues with non-Chinese families. This involves engaging in discourse with others, which is sometimes easier said than done. Nevertheless, Kim (2001) comments, “We cannot truly learn to communicate without communicating, just as we cannot learn to swim without actually plunging into the water” (p. 229). Encouraging discourse will strengthen an immigrant’s circle of “weak ties,” people to turn to for advice and support.

While schools make every effort to facilitate communication among adults by offering occasional parent nights, it appears that a more concerted and longer term effort might be necessary to assist immigrant families in interacting with Americans. This endeavor might include instituting an ongoing program of cultural exchanges between families within a school. Cross-cultural adaptation should be a two-way exchange of ideas and information. Family exchanges that are based on facilitating intercultural communication can truly expand the idea of parental involvement in the schools. An example is Bob's educational trip to Washington, D.C., an extraordinary event that cannot be duplicated by many parents. However, the trip allowed him to fulfill a desire that he had to communicate with non-Chinese parents.

As a final point, it is necessary to remark upon the cultural abilities of one of the parents, Dewey. Of the five participants, he demonstrated the strongest capability to reflect in English and to understand the American education system. This might be due to his length of time in the United States, 16 years, his strong English language skills, and his reflective nature. Within the Chinese language school, he was a leader and acted as a natural cultural informant. Immigrants such as Dewey have a pivotal role to play in helping other fathers acculturate more quickly.

Conclusion

Although the participants had a diversity of opinions, they shared a deep respect for the value of educating young people. Frank expressed that commitment succinctly when he stated:

Okay, education it's very important for the development of the country, for people, for the society. The kids are the next generation. They're going to build up the country, contribute to the country, contribute to society. So, the kids can get a lot from education. So a good education is important to the people of this country.

The preceding paragraph might contain a sentiment that is commonly shared and expressed by many others. However, after following the lives of these five fathers, it is hard not to believe that there is real power to these words, along with an obligation to fulfill the promise to educate their children well.

Endnotes

¹A clarification is necessary concerning the term "Chinese" in this study, both in reference to the country and the language. The participants are referred to as coming from Mainland China, which is formally called the People's Republic of China. There are no participants in this study from Taiwan. In addition, the participants speak Mandarin Chinese, which is the

default language used in both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. However, Cantonese Chinese is the main language in Hong Kong and areas of Southern China.

² There are romanized spellings of Chinese words in the study. These are included because the participants made reference to them during the interviews. At times, Chinese words such as *zuoren* have an emotional impact that is absent in English. Two major systems for transliterating Chinese to a romanized alphabet exist, Wade-Giles and Pinyin. Wade-Giles is an older system that is still used in Taiwan, while Pinyin is the romanization currently in use in Mainland China (Killingley, 1998). The following is an example of spelling in the two systems: The romanized word for "humanism" in Wade-Giles is *jen*, while in Pinyin it is *ren*.

³ "Chinese Education Forum" (Lecture, The University of Memphis, June 15, 2003).

⁴ The names of the participants are pseudonyms. English names were mutually agreed upon by both the participants and the researcher (some of the men were already using English names in the workplace).

⁵ The accounts offered represent a sincere attempt to portray the views and the language of the fathers as they were presented during the interviews. Although the participants used English on a daily basis at work, they were all non-native speakers and had varying degrees of English-language proficiency. To respect the linguistic abilities of the participants, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary from the transcripts were kept intact in the following narratives unless mistakes created problems in comprehension. Any changes that were made in the language are identified by brackets.

References

- Adelman, M. B., Parks, M. R., & Albrecht, T. L. (1987). Beyond close relationships: Support in weak ties. In T. Albrecht, M. B. Adelman, et al. (Eds.), *Communicating social support* (pp. 126-147). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Banks, J. A. (1998). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4-17.
- Barton, A. C., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(4), 3-12.
- Berndt, T. J., Cheung, P. C., Lau, S., Hau, K.-T., & Lew, W. J. F. (1993). Perceptions of parenting in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Sex differences and societal differences. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(1), 156-164.
- Chao, R. (1994). Beyond parental control and authoritarian parenting style: Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training. *Child Development*, 65, 1111-1119.
- Chao, R. (1996). Chinese and European American mothers' beliefs about the role of parenting in children's school success. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(4), 403-423.
- Chao, R. (2000). The parenting of immigrant Chinese and European American mothers: Relations between parenting styles, socialization goals, and parental practices. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21(2), 233-248.
- Chao, R., & Tseng, V. (2002). Parenting of Asians. In M. H. Bornstein (Series Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Volume 4. Social conditions and applied parenting* (2nd ed., pp. 59-93). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Epstein, J. L. (1987). Parent involvement: What research says to administrators. *Education and Urban Society*, 19(2), 119-136.

- Fantini, A. E. (2000, Spring). A central concern: Developing intercultural competence. In *Occasional Paper Series Number 1*. Retrieved July 26, 2007 from the World Learning Web site: <http://www.worldlearning.org/SITOccasionalPapers/sitops01.pdf>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gordon, M. M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion, and national origin*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gorman, J. C. (1998). Parenting attitudes and practices of immigrant Chinese mothers of adolescents. *Family Relations*, 47(1), 73-80.
- Grolnick, W. S., & Slowiaczek, M. L. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: A multidimensional conceptualization and organizational model. *Child Development*, 65(1), 237-252.
- Hammer, M. R., Gudykunst, W. B., & Wiseman, R. L. (1978). Dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2, 382-393.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Retrieved July 27, 2007, from the Southwest Educational Development Lab Web site: <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>
- Huntsinger, C. S., Krieg, D. B., & Jose, P. E. (1998). *Parental involvement in children's schooling: Different meanings in different cultures*. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, Bern, Switzerland. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED422423)
- Hsu, F. L. K. (1955). *Americans and Chinese*. London: The Cresset Press.
- Hsu, F. L. K. (1985). The self in cross-cultural perspective. In A. J. Marsella, G. DeVos, & F. L. K. Hsu (Eds.), *Culture and self: Asian and western perspectives* (pp. 24-55). New York: Tavistock Publications.
- Jackson, K., & Remillard, J. T. (2005). Rethinking parent involvement: African American mothers construct their roles in the mathematics education of their children. *The School Community Journal*, 15(1), 51-73.
- Killingley, S-Y. (1998). *Learning to read Pinyin romanization and its equivalent in Wade-Giles: A practical course for students of Chinese*. Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1995). Cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory. In R. L. Wiseman (Ed.), *Intercultural communication theory* (pp. 170-193). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Klein, A. (2004). *Perspective transformation among mainland Chinese fathers interacting with the American K-12 educational system*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Memphis.
- Lee, F. Y. (1995). Asian parents as partners. *Young Children*, 50(3), 4-9.
- Lee, W. O. (1996). The cultural context for Chinese learners: Conceptions of learning in the Confucian tradition. In D. A. Watkins, & J. B. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (pp. 25-41). Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.
- Li, G. (2006). What do parents think? Middle-class Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on literacy learning, homework, and school-home communication. *The School Community Journal*, 16(2), 27-46.
- McKenzie, L. (1991). *Adult education and worldview construction*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.

- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.-Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamad, M. (2001). Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures [Electronic version]. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5), 405-416.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pratt, D. D. (1991). Conceptions of self within China and the United States: Contrasting foundations for adult education. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 15, 285-309.
- Pratt, D. D., Kelly, M., & Wong, W. S. S. (1999). Chinese conceptions of "effective teaching" in Hong Kong: Towards culturally sensitive evaluation of teaching. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18(4), 241-258.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schuetz, A. (1960). The stranger: An essay in social psychology. In M. R. Stein, A. J. Vidich, & D. M. White (Eds.), *Identity and anxiety: Survival of the person in mass society* (pp. 98-109). Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Seidel, J. (1998). The Ethnograph (Version 5.0) [Computer software]. Thousand Oaks, CA: Scolari, Sage Publications Software.
- Simmel, G. (1950). The stranger. In K. H. Wolff (Ed. & Trans.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: The Free Press. (Original work published 1908)
- Siu, S.-F. (1996). *Questions & answers: What research says about the education of Chinese American children*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400077).
- Solomon, R. H. (1971). *Mao's revolution and the Chinese political culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, L. G. (1996). *Chinese religion: An introduction* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Tian, Z. (Director). (1993). *The blue kite* [Motion picture]. China: U.S. Distributor, Kino International.
- Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., & Greenfield, P. M. (2000). *Bridging cultures in our schools: New approaches that work*. Retrieved July 30, 2006, from http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/lcd-99-01.pdf
- Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., & Hernandez, E. (2003). Parent involvement in schooling – According to whose values? *The School Community Journal*, 13(2), 45-72.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). Census 2000, San Francisco, California, demographic profile highlights: Chinese alone or in any combination. Retrieved, October 18, 2008, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFIteratedFacts?_event=&geo_id=16000US0667000&geoContext=01000US%7C04000US06%7C16000US0667000&street=&county=San+Francisco&cityTown=San+Francisco&state=04000US06&zip=&lang=en&sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=160&submenuId=factsheet_2&ds_name=DEC_2000_SAFF&ci_nbr=035&qname=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1160®=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1160%3A035&keyword=&industry
- Wu, D. Y. H. (1996). Chinese childhood socialization. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The handbook of Chinese psychology* (pp. 143-154). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

- Xie, Q., & Hultgren, F. (1994). Urban Chinese parents' perceptions of their strengths and needs in rearing "only" sons and daughters. *Home Economics Research Journal*, 22(3), 340-356.
- Xie, Q., Seefeldt, C., & Tam, H. P. (1996). *Parenting style and only children's school achievement in China*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED396819)
- Yum, J. O. (1988). The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 374-388.
- Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (1998). *Best practice: New standards for teaching and learning in America's schools* (2nd ed.) Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Zhang, Y. (Director). (1994). *To live* [Motion picture]. China: Released by Samuel Goldwyn.
- Zhou, X., & Hou, L. (1999). Children of the Cultural Revolution: The state and the life course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review*, 64(1), 12-36.

Alan Klein is an instructor at the University of British Columbia's English Language Institute. Previously, he was a Senior Fellow in Cambodia for the U.S. State Department's English Language Fellow Program. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Alan Klein, English Language Institute, UBC Continuing Studies, 2121 West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4, or to alan.klein@ubc.ca.

Author's Note: I would like to acknowledge the five fathers who generously gave hours of their time allowing me to understand their lived experiences as immigrants in a new culture. I was humbled by their devotion to their children and always tried to keep in mind that they permitted my intrusiveness because they believed the research would help build better relations between Chinese families and the American educational system.

Family-School Relations as Social Capital: Chinese Parents in the United States

Dan Wang

Abstract

Guided by both Coleman and Bourdieu's theories on social capital, I interviewed Chinese immigrant parents to understand their experiences in weaving social connections with the school and teachers to benefit their children's education. This study confirms Coleman's argument that human capital in parents will not transfer to the children automatically. The intergenerational transmission process is interrupted because the parents, although well educated, are not familiar with norms and practices in the new education system. In sharp contrast to parents in China, who aggressively seek and create opportunities to connect with teachers, immigrant Chinese parents adopt a passive role in initiating contacts with school and teachers. Factors contributing to the lower parental commitment to networking include time, jobs, language, and cultural barriers. However, the deeper reason lies in the change of people's mindsets when they experience a dramatic shift in the surrounding social structures. The informant parents view American schools as egalitarian and competition free and, therefore, attribute to parent-teacher relationships less instrumental value in their children's success than they would in China. American education professionals would be surprised by these parents' naivety and idealization of American schools. Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to conclude that the lack of parental involvement is due to external restrictions or immigrant parents' misunderstanding of the current U.S. society.

Key Words: social capital, parental involvement, immigrant family, Chinese parents, networking, teachers, relations, United States, public schools, Asian

Introduction

The concept of social capital is acknowledged as valuable by an increasing number of educators and sociologists of education because it lends the researchers a new explanatory power, in addition to the traditional factors, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status (SES), for stratification in the school system. Along this line of literature, researchers try to predict students' academic achievement (Carbonaro, 1998; Kim, 2002; McNeal, 1999; Morgan & Sorensen, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997), drop-out risk (Carbonaro; Croninger & Lee, 2001; McNeal), and college attendance and other life chances (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995) influenced by parents' social capital. The concept of parents' social capital in these studies is operationalized in diverse ways; it incorporates a wide range of indicators, such as "mother attended school meetings" (Furstenberg & Hughes), "parents know parents" (Morgan & Sorensen), "homework checking" (Kim), and "mother's expectation for child's education" (Coleman, 1988). Many of these variables are not new at all in educators' attempts to explain the differences in students' performances and achievement in school. Inevitably, this leads me to question the legitimacy in using the term "social capital." Is it a new bottle that contains the old wine? Why not simply use "parental involvement" or "family support," which may carry more intuitive meaning than the term "social capital"? Maybe the word "capital" is used merely to attract new or greater attention to the old sociological or educational issues.

Despite these doubts, I still consider parents' social capital as a necessary and valuable concept. For one, its boundary is more extensive than that of school-based or family-based personal relationships; it can be extended to parents' worksites, religious affiliation, and other social organizations, some of which are not included in the aforementioned studies. Secondly, and more significantly, social capital is not a static and arbitrary collection of personal interactions occurring in different social sites; instead, it should be imagined as a network woven by the individual parent around him/herself for a specific purpose – better education for the child. Such an interlaced network allows dynamic flows of resources from one link in the network to another in the process of accomplishing the goal. The resources, not the network per se, are the key in the concept of social capital according to Bourdieu's definition (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 119). The nature of the network and the amount of resources available in the network may be responsible for differentiation in students' school performance and achievement. Therefore, the concept of social capital is not exactly redundant to the other existing notions in education research.

The empirical works on parents' social capital, most of which rely on quantitative analyses, mainly follow Coleman's theoretical framework (Dika & Singh, 2002). These authors endeavor to establish the correlation between the amount of social capital possessed by the parent and the children's school performance. This body of literature is insufficient in two ways. First, researchers fail to detect the mechanisms that transform social connections into something that could benefit children's school experiences. Coleman (1988) argues that social closure among parents can facilitate reinforcement of social norms and social control, and therefore leads to a higher degree of congruence of parents' and children's views on, for example, the instrumental value of education in one's life opportunities. Yet, the degree of social control in relation to parents' closure has not been directly measured and tested. Bourdieu's theory on access to resources in social networks (Portes, 1998) may be helpful in identifying the invisible mechanisms, but unfortunately, only a few researchers have taken advantage of it (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Secondly, only a few studies have focused on immigrant parents' social connectedness and their children's education (Bhattacharya, 2000; Kim, 2002; Zhang, Ollila, & Harvey, 1998). Experiences of immigrant parents are undoubtedly unique in that they depart from their well-established social networks in their home countries and need to construct new ones in a new environment, possibly with significant language and cultural barriers. With a growing proportion of immigrant children in U.S. schools, research on immigrant parents' social capital is certainly pertinent to the improvement of America's schools.

For this study, I interviewed nine Chinese parents in six families so as to understand their experiences as immigrant parents in weaving their social networks to benefit their children's education. I was also interested in exploring how their Chinese background influenced their expectations and perceptions of American education, which in turn may have predetermined their strategies of networking with other people.

Theoretical Frameworks

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and American sociologist James Coleman are the major contributing figures in the theoretical development of the concept of social capital (Dika & Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998). Bourdieu (1986) discussed the interaction of three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital. A person would activate the capitals he/she possesses to achieve personal interests in accordance with the dominant practice in a specific social setting – the field – and also conditioned by his/her dispositions that are produced by his/her prior life experiences – the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1992).

Coleman (1988) focused on the role of social capital in the creation of human capital, namely students' educational attainment. Dika and Singh commented on Coleman's model as having "structural-functionalist roots." They continued to summarize that "social capital has been elaborated in two principal ways: in terms of norms [along Coleman's theory] and in terms of access to institutional resources" [rooted in Bourdieu] (p. 33).

Norms

Coleman (1988) defined social capital by its function. "It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether person or corporate actors – within the structure" (p. S98). The structure is the relations among the actors. Social capital is inherent in these relations and is productive in the sense that it helps realize personal interest (since this article concentrates on the individual level only) that in its absence would be impossible.

Coleman (1988) has identified three forms of social capital: (1) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures; (2) information channels; and (3) norms and effective sanctions. The first form of social capital can be interpreted as the amount of credits accumulated that are expected to be repaid according to the norm of reciprocity. A helps B and trusts B to return the favor in time. At first look, an instrumental motivation seems to be the source for this form of social capital; a close look can reveal that it is contingent on the norm of reciprocity and the severity of social sanctions once the norm is violated. Information channels can spread the deeds in compliance with the social norms or disclose the behaviors in violation of the norms, hence incurring social sanctions in the latter case. In either case, information channels facilitate the reinforcement of the social norms.

One important argument of Coleman (1988) is that financial and human capital of parents is necessary in the development of human capital in their children, but each by itself is not sufficient (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997). Social capital within the family – discussions with children, monitoring and helping with homework, number of siblings, and so forth – helps the children to take advantages of the financial, cultural, and human resources available to them in the family. In the past decade, the effect of family-based social capital has been tested in an extensive body of research. Dika and Singh (2002) gave a comprehensive review on the methods and findings of these studies. Most findings show positive relations between family-based social capital and students' learning and school attainment.

Coleman's essay on social capital in the creation of human capital has a far-reaching influence on educators and researchers who are interested in this issue. Despite reasonable criticisms by some scholars (Dika & Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998), several of Coleman's concepts, such as the structure of social closure and mechanisms of norms, are undeniably refreshing and enlightening.

Access to Institutional Resources

Another source of social capital theories is the work of Pierre Bourdieu. He defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1986, p. 248). There is a clear distinction between the resources and the network, that is, the access to the resources, in Bourdieu's definition (Dika & Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998). "The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent...depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Social capital is not to be understood in isolation, but in relation to other forms of capital – economic and cultural – and more importantly, in relation to the field and the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Economic capital is that which is "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights..." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Cultural capital exists in three forms: in the embodied, objectified, or institutionalized state (p. 243). The embodied state refers to the dispositions in the body and mind; the objectified state means cultural goods like books, music recordings, and movies; institutionalized cultural capital mainly refers to formal academic qualifications. All three types of capital can be converted from one type to another. Yet, economic capital is the root of the rest of types of capital; social and cultural capital is reducible to economic capital in the final analysis (pp. 252-253). Cultural and social capital, like economic capital, takes labor and time to accumulate. The longer social and cultural capital take to accumulate, the more invisible their function as mediation to the reproduction of economic capital; however, this also entails higher risk of loss, for example, unwise trust or failure to find employment upon graduation. In a given situation, the possessor of the capital will decide to utilize a certain type of capital or transform one type to another so as to achieve certain ends, which ultimately can be translated into economic terms. However, social capital works in a way that is unique compared with other types of capital. Social capital makes it possible for an individual to use the resources (capital) institutionalized into the network but possessed by other members, not by him/herself.

Bourdieu (1986) insists that the definitions of capital are meaningful only in the systematic framework of capital – field and habitus. A field may be defined as “a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions” (p. 97). These positions and relations among the positions are objectively defined, existing independently of the occupants of these positions. A field is often compared to a card game, both of which follow rules or regularities. In a game, the number of players and relations (winner or loser, for example) among the players are defined objectively. Players play against each other to compete for the stakes. The relative values of the cards they receive change with each game just as the hierarchy of the capital varies in different fields. Capital is a socially defined term and its content is subject to constant changes depending on the rules of various games or dominant practices in different fields. Players play according to the rules. They may win or lose, based on what cards they get in each game. However, players do not behave like machines which mechanically receive cards, show them, and find out the winner. Instead, they estimate their positions relative to other players based on their evaluation of the cards in their hands. Then, they will decide on the best strategy to use their cards. The agency in the players, estimation, evaluation, and decision making, roots in individual dispositions that have been accumulated from previous life experiences. Though constrained by the existing rules in the field, people are always actively creating changes to the structure they are in. It is the dynamic interplay of field and habitus, of structure and agency, that determines the process and outcome of a social event.

Background of Chinese Parents

Immigrant parents with a non-mainstream cultural background are likely to confront difficulties in communication with their children’s schools, association with other parents, or helping with their children’s school work. Ariza (2002) lists many common reasons why immigrant parents fail to actively participate in their children’s education: language barriers, time conflict, and most alarmingly, their expectations of schools that are rooted in their own home cultures and that are different from the typical American ones. Lacking knowledge about these reasons, especially the potential cultural mismatches, some teachers regard the immigrant parents as “apathetic” or indifferent to their children’s education (Ariza). In actuality, studies on Korean (Kim, 2002), Latino (Goldenberg et al., 2001), and Chinese (Zhang et al., 1998) immigrant parents show that, generally, parents hold high expectations of their children’s educational achievement and believe in the instrumental value of formal schooling for bettering their children’s life chances. Yet, exposed to a new culture, they

may not realize what the school and teachers expect from them. In addition, they may not have the knowledge needed to assist with their children's school work in this new education system. Active participation and frequent communication with teachers and other parents could render the immigrant parents better informed about the typical mainstream school practices, thus improving their disadvantaged position. Some schools have devised programs to reach out to the immigrant parents in their community, providing orientations, sample classes, and trainings to get them familiar with the operation of the schools (Lindeman, 2001). These programs are considered helpful in bridging the gap between the parents and the teachers.

The diverse origins of immigrant families might result in varied responses from the parents regarding the practices in their children's schools, even though they are attending exactly the same orientation program. The family-school relations in their home countries predefine the parents' self-perceptions of their own positions relative to the school. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to compare a certain home culture and the host culture, in this case the U.S. culture, in regard to education, and also to investigate the behavioral changes or non-changes of immigrant parents in the new culture. This study focuses on parent-school relations of Chinese immigrant parents in the United States that facilitate or hinder their children's educational development. To understand families' behaviors and mentalities in America, it is also important to review common parenting practices in China.

Urban parents in China generally hold high expectations for their children's educational attainment. College education is considered to be a must if it is within the financial capacity of the family. The competition for college entrance is fierce. In the early 1990s, the college enrollment rate was around 20% nationwide. Recent years have seen a significant increase in college enrollment rate, up to around 40-50%. While the entrance pressure is relaxed, a new round of competition is centered on getting into top-ranking institutions.

Education in China is a state-managed enterprise. Universal curricula are designed by the Education Ministry of the central government and applied to all schools throughout the nation, from primary to high schools, except for several experimental provinces. Not surprisingly, then, college entrance qualifications are determined by students' scores on the college entrance exams, which are held annually on the same dates for all high school graduates nationwide. Consequently, both schools and parents attach tremendous significance to children's academic achievement, especially to the courses that are pertinent to college entrance exams. Parents are strict regarding their children's academic performances. For those parents who received higher education, they often closely monitor children's homework, give children extra exercises, or teach their children advanced classes at home.

An interesting phenomenon in China is that urban parents take great initiatives to connect with the teachers in hopes that teachers can help their children more in learning. They often visit the school and meet with teachers in private; they visit teachers' homes and give them gifts, sometimes expensive gifts, on festivals or official holidays; they make real efforts to help teachers whenever possible, for example, repairing the teacher's stereo system or even seeking employment for a teacher's child. The relationships between parents and teachers are about students' educational achievement, but go beyond the boundary of educational issues. The relations are so personal that, to a large extent, parents have become crucial resources for teachers to solve their own personal problems. This utilitarian relationship between parents and teachers is almost an open secret to urban residents, but is surprisingly under-researched and documented. Although much of the description here is drawn from my personal experience and observations, participants in this study confirmed it as highly relevant to their own experiences with teachers in China.

With this prior knowledge in mind, I was very interested in looking at Chinese immigrant parents' social networks in the American setting. Do parents try to connect with teachers with the same incentives and initiatives? What are the reasons for changes or persistence in their parenting practices? What are the actual or potential ramifications on their children's development resulting from such networks or from the absence of such networks? As the number of Chinese immigrant students increases in U.S. schools, answers to these questions can be helpful for educators to understand the needs of students and parents in this ethnic group and to adopt more inclusive strategies that lead to more parental involvement. For sociologists of education, answering these questions might help identify the mechanisms that mobilize parents' social capital to facilitate children's school achievement, as well as the influential factors accounting for discrepancies in the amount of social capital.

Methods

I interviewed nine parents in six Chinese families. For three families, I interviewed the mothers only; for the other three families, both parents were interviewed at the same time. Each interview took 1-1½ hours. The three-step interview approach (Seidman, 1998, pp. 11-12) was adopted to structure the interviews. However, instead of conducting three separate interviews, all three steps – asking for interviewees focused life histories, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning of their experiences – were covered in one interview per family. Mishler warned against the “one-shot interview conducted by an interviewer without local knowledge of a respondent's life situation” (1986, p.

24). Such an interview, he continued, would not “provide the necessary contextual basis for adequate interpretation.” In this study, as a Chinese immigrant myself, I shared many similar life experiences with the participants, and therefore my prior knowledge gave me an in-depth understanding of the impact of their Chinese background on their life situations in the U.S. Hence, my ethnic status might help reduce the concern raised by Mishler.

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin, tape recorded, and later transcribed and coded (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Mason, 2002). Conversations quoted in this paper were translated from Mandarin by the researcher. I understood that there were potential disadvantages to my position: being a Chinese myself could blind me from seeing some aspects that otherwise would be easily identified by an “outsider.” With this caution in mind, I discussed the field notes and transcriptions with both Chinese and American colleagues to gain different perspectives on the data collected. Based on Coleman’s and Bourdieu’s theoretical frameworks, I extracted the themes and tried to interpret the same set of data from both functional and institutional perspectives (Janesick, 1998). Finally, I paid short visits to the participants to verify the accuracy of data and to confirm my speculations and interpretation of their behaviors.

To recruit the participants, I started with the families with whom I personally had contact. Then the snowball sampling strategy was used to identify potential participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). At the end of each interview, I requested the existing participants to recommend families that had at least one child who was attending a public school.

Five out of the six families had only one child, each born in mainland China. One family had two children: the older one was born in China, while the 2-year-old younger son was born in the U.S. All were two-parent families. All fathers had received graduate education, two with masters degrees and four holding doctorates. Mothers’ education levels were lower, one with a two-year college certificate, one with a masters degree, and the rest with bachelor’s degrees. The fathers all had full-time jobs. Three mothers had full-time jobs; one was working part-time; the other two were homemakers. The annual family incomes ranged from \$30,000 to \$60,000. Two of the families had achieved permission for permanent residence; three families were applying for the status; one family was hesitating about whether to stay or return to China. One family moved to the U.S. from another English-speaking country, and their child had completed elementary and middle school in that country. Except for this child, all other children came directly from China. When the interviews were conducted, three children were attending elementary schools; two children were in middle school; as mentioned previously, one child had completed middle school in a third country and was attending a high school in the U.S.

Results

Epstein (1990, p. 104) distinguishes two kinds of education models that affect parent-teacher relationships: one model that emphasizes specialization of skills, and another model that emphasizes generalization of skills. The former separates the academic skills required by teachers via school training from other skills taught by parents via home training. With specialization comes a division of labor that pulls apart the function of school and of family, which restricts the communication and cooperation between parents and teachers. The second model focuses on teaching “the whole child.” Schools teach social skills, concepts of home, development of talents, and so on, which traditionally are part of the responsibility of parents. Parents are advised to pay attention to children’s learning abilities and academic skills, the responsibility traditionally assigned to teachers. Thus, teachers and parents share “overlapping spheres of influence” that ultimately promote teacher-parent conversation and collaboration.

Chinese Parents perceived U.S. education more as the generalization model. Compared with the schools in China, parents saw apparent distinctions between the two systems in their education emphases. One couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ding (pseudonyms, as are all names used in this article), whose daughter was a first grader, commented on the difference:

Mrs. Ding: Here [in the U.S.], schools mainly stress on kids’ behaviors, being polite, caring. When holidays come, the kids are always asked to make cards or write letters [for each other].

Mr. Ding: Right! [U.S. schools] put more emphasis on emotions. For example, on Valentine’s Day, wow, all the kids are required to prepare cards and gifts for each other. Birthdays, also. He invites him; she invites her. Lots of social activities like this. This indeed has a lot of influence on [my daughter’s] emotional development. We Chinese call this “EQ” [emotional quotient]. I feel they [U.S. teachers] care a lot about EQ. As to IQ, unlike in China, they don’t fill kids with [knowledge] at young ages.

Other parents expressed similar views on schools’ emphases in teaching. They thought Chinese teachers restricted their attention to students’ academic achievement, but the U.S. schools were more into the “well-rounded” development of children.

Mrs. Wu, whose son was in second grade: [Schools] don’t care much about learning grades. They care about ability, like the ability to make crafts, or drawing. They have drawing competitions, singing competitions, etcetera, quite often. As to academic grades, they don’t care as much as we Chinese.

Mrs. Zhang, whose son is in first grade also: Here [U.S. schools] teach children to be independent, to be creative. Kids are developing well-rounded.

They take Arts class, make nice and pretty crafts. [Teachers] stress on “do-it-yourself” kind of ability. Well, in China, only physics or chemistry is the most important.

Contrary to what Epstein predicts, the model of generalization of skills did not bring about the anticipated partnership between teachers and parents, at least for these immigrant Chinese parents. Parent-teacher contacts were rare, and parent participation in school activities was low.

Parent-Teacher Contacts

Parents reported that opportunities for them to have an in-depth discussion with teachers occurred only once or twice per year at conferences, 15 minutes on each occasion. Usually such meetings were arranged after the summary student reports were distributed to parents. Schools set aside one or two days and parents were asked to pick a preferred time to meet the teachers. When parents found out the problems their children had experienced in school either from the reports or from their conversations with the children, they used these chances to communicate the problems with the teacher. Mrs. Wu, mother of a second grade son, Ming, once read in the report that the Physical Education (PE) teacher gave her son a low grade. She was curious about this and went to see the teacher.

Mrs. Wu: I met with the PE teacher once because my son seemed to have a problem in PE. My son couldn't understand the teacher. The teacher asked him to do the exercises, but he couldn't get it. So the teacher thought he was slow-minded. I told the teacher about it later. This semester, the PE teacher knew this and repeated himself a couple of times in the class. Also, my son has made fast progress in English. So the language problem is not so serious now. But back then, the PE teacher gave him a terribly low grade. My son is big and tall among his classmates. I might not be sure about his [English] reading or writing, but I sure knew he wouldn't be bad at sports.... So I went to see the teacher and asked him about the low grade. He told me that my son was slow-minded. So I asked what he meant by “slow-minded.” Then my son said he didn't understand what the teacher asked him to do in the class. The whole thing was made clear finally.

Mr. Wang had a talk with the teacher about his daughter Meng's English progress a couple of years ago. At the time, Meng had been in U.S. for one year and was transferred to a new school. She used to have an ESL teacher in the old school, but did not have one in the new school. Mr. Wang met the teacher and asked her if Meng could have extra ESL classes as she did in the old school.

Mr. Wang: The teacher was very nice. She said that if I worried about Meng's English, the school had an ESL teacher, too, and I could seek help from her.

But she also told me her own opinion on Meng's English proficiency. She said Meng spoke English just like the American kids did. She didn't think it was necessary to get her an ESL teacher. Anyway, I had a feeling at the time that the teacher thought Meng was good at everything. Actually, this was not what I knew about my daughter. The American teacher only picked the pleasant things to talk.

Author: Did you tell her your feeling?

Mr. Wang: Yeah, I did. But she seemed to be upset on hearing it. I could see that she was not happy about it. I said, I didn't think that Meng's English was good enough, especially in reading. She was not doing as well as other kids. After I said it, the teacher kind of made me feel "aha, are you complaining about my teaching?" She went like "eh, how come?" Actually, I didn't mean that [complaining] at all. I was just worrying that the child might still have [difficulties in language]. Later, I said to myself: in Rome, do as Romans do. So I never again mention things like this [to teachers].

Other parents thought the official parent-teacher meetings were not very productive. Parents felt they could not go deep enough in their conversations with teachers. Also, the time was too short; the parents could not occupy the teachers too long since more parents were waiting to meet the teachers, too.

Apart from the official meetings, parents would not take the initiative to contact teachers unless they spotted serious problems. They chose to visit teachers in school to discuss the problems or alternative methods of contacting teachers, for instance, in writing. For parents with significant difficulties in speaking English, writing might be an effective means of communication. Mr. Ding used to write letters to his daughter's teacher:

Mr. Ding: I wrote a letter to the teacher. Lin [his daughter] had a good friend in her class. That child could speak both Chinese and English. During classes, Lin didn't understand teacher's instructions. So the teacher sometimes asked this child to explain to Lin. In the end, this child became sort of like a little boss of Lin. This had a negative influence on Lin's self-esteem and confidence. She often complained to me: "why does that child know better than me? Why does that child always command me?" Obviously, [she] felt the suppressing pressure. This hurt her confidence...I wrote a letter asking the teacher to help her make more friends, not only restricted to this one child. Moreover, help her improve English both in speaking and in listening. Finally I requested, if the situation continued, I would like to move Lin to another class, or at least have the kids separated if Lin was to stay.

Mrs. Ding: The teacher noticed this and made effort to prevent it from happening again. Later, when Lin entered first grade, the two kids were put into different classes. [The information above] - was in kindergarten.

The relations between Chinese parents and the U.S. teachers stayed at a “business-to-business” level, unlike the personal level connections in China. Parents did not mention any intention to develop such personal relationships with teachers. Gift-giving from parents to teachers, which was common in China, did not happen often if it happened at all. Mrs. Zhang mentioned once about gift-giving in kindergarten.

Mrs. Zhang: We didn’t know how the Americans handled things when we first arrived here. As time moved on, we didn’t find much difference. Americans, Chinese, all the same. Like New Year’s Day, Christmas, they gave gifts to teachers, too. At first we didn’t know this. Other people told me so. They [Americans] gave the teacher a lot of stuff. One parent, her child in pre-school, didn’t have a job. So, she had time to visit school. She told me those American parents also gave teachers lots of presents on Christmas, Thanksgiving, and so forth. Later, I came across this myself. It was the Christmas time. I went to pick up my son after school. I saw there were lots of gifts on the table. I thought they were the gifts parents prepared for the kids. Later, I found out they were for the teacher! Luckily I brought with me a little Chinese souvenir for the teacher too that time. I really meant to thank the teacher for her help with my son’s English learning. Then, my son went to first grade. I didn’t see parents giving gifts to the teacher again. So I didn’t give her anything either. I asked another Chinese parent if she sent any gift to the teacher. She answered me: “Gifts? Of course not! I didn’t even get to see her this semester!”

Mr. and Mrs. Zhang did not continue to give presents to teachers partly because they did not see gift-giving carry the same meaning in the U.S. schools as in China.

Mr. Zhang: Those gifts were little inexpensive stuffs. Parents gave them to the teacher just to show their thanks. They didn’t intend to please the teacher. It was nothing like the gift-giving in China. When my son was in kindergarten in China, my mother, my son’s grandma, sent gifts to the teacher’s home, asking the teacher to take extra care of my kid. We paid the fees in full and did everything required by the kindergarten. But, my mother still insisted on visiting the teacher in private and gave her the gifts. She was worried that the teacher would care more about other children instead of our own kid. That was completely different. Here, we don’t see it necessary to give gifts to teachers.

Generally parents were satisfied with teachers’ work. In fact, parents with children in elementary school expressed the most satisfaction with teachers. They described teachers as caring, nice, and treating the children equally.

Mr. Ding: I feel in my heart that Lin's teacher likes her very much....This is very important! When the teacher likes a student, or at least the student feels that the teacher likes her, no matter if it is true or not, this is a big blessing for this kid. This child will constantly feel an encouragement. It is very hard [for a child] to have that feeling in China.

Mrs. Ding inserted: Lin's often thought about giving her teacher a hug. It would be impossible if she were in China.

Mr. Ding: We were very worried at the beginning. Our English was poor; Lin's English was poor also when she came to U.S. We were afraid she would be discriminated against. It turned out that she said her teacher liked her a lot. We had the same feeling since the teacher introduced her own kid to be Lin's friend. All my worries disappeared. This is so important! No matter if the teacher truly likes her or not, at least, the kid feels that teacher cares about her. It is not easy for a teacher to accomplish this. This teacher is very successful in this respect!

Parents with children in middle school or high school normally sang praises for teachers, also. Though two mothers thought the teacher-student ties were not as close in higher grades as in elementary school, generally they were still satisfied with teachers and schools.

In sum, parents' contacts with teachers were problem driven, with a specific purpose at a certain time. Despite the low frequency of contacts, many times the exchanges with teachers did benefit their children's development.

Parent Participation in School

Relative to connecting with teachers, parents were more active in attending the school activities, such as a scientific invention show, Christmas performances, open house, and so forth. Mr. and Mrs. Ding took part in almost all school events if possible. They saw the participation as one way to cultivate self-confidence in their daughter. They went to the events like the rest of the American parents so that their daughter would not feel that she was different from other American children. Conversation with some parents did indicate that the immigrant children might indeed have a fear of being viewed as different. Mr. Wang mentioned that his daughter, Meng, once asked him not to participate in a parent talent show held by her school. Mr. Wang wanted to take part in the basketball game with other parents and teachers. Meng did not want him to play, because she thought he was too short compared with her PE teacher and her friends' fathers.

All the parents I interviewed except one mother, Mrs. Tao, said they never volunteer in their children's schools. Mrs. Tao used to volunteer in her daughter Ning's elementary school. Ning finished second grade in China and entered

third grade when she first came to the U.S. Mrs. Tao spoke limited English, but she still volunteered in her daughter's class and enjoyed doing it.

Mrs. Tao: At that time, the teacher encouraged parents to go to the class. That would make it easier for her to communicate [with Ning]. Ning never learned English in China. I had classes with her. If Ning couldn't understand what the teacher was talking, I could tell her. Kind of coordination work. I went to her class for quite a period of time. The teacher was teaching in the front and I sat in the last row. When the teacher needed to pass around some handouts or paper or pencils, I went up to help her, assisting her work....I didn't go to her school every day, only once or twice per week. Sometimes, they had fieldtrips and the teacher would need two or three parents to help her take care of the children. Or sometimes, like Halloween, they needed people to paint pumpkins. I volunteered on those occasions also. I found it helpful to do this. I could know more about their [American] school life, teaching approaches, and so forth. So basically, when Ning was in third and fourth grade, I pretty much knew, like teaching in the school, her communication with teachers, the differences between her and other children, and how American children behaved in school. [Before that] I didn't know much about foreign kids' school performances. [I] never had the chance to see them.

Like other parents, Mrs. Tao often called American kids "foreign kids" even though she was fully aware that she and her family were the real foreigners in the United States. Later Mrs. Tao gave birth to a second child and did not have time to volunteer any more. Yet she believed volunteering could be very helpful, and she wanted to sit in Ning's classes if possible. Ning had been longing for her mother to go to school, too. Mrs. Tao mentioned that Ning often asked her, "Why don't you come to my classes any more, mom?" After Ning entered middle school, she managed to go to Ning's class only once.

Other parents received notices from school informing them of volunteer opportunities, also, but they never participated. When asked if they saw any influence of parents' volunteer work on children's school life, most parents responded negatively. However, Mrs. Wu recalled an interesting thing her son, Ming, told her about his friend Robert.

Mrs. Wu: My son said the kids all loved the computer class. One day, my son came home pretty upset. He said usually kids had computer class once every other week, but Robert could take computer class every week. I thought about it and came to the conclusion that it was because Robert's mom often volunteered as an assistant teacher. So this [parent's volunteer work] did make a difference. The teacher let him have more computer classes. Whatever he liked, the teacher would let him have it first.

Parents behaved differently toward various kinds of school participation. They took a relatively active stance toward events that involved more passive participation, like attending a drawing exhibition, open house, and so on, but mostly were indifferent to volunteer work, which required more time and energy input. Parents seldom attended PTO meetings because they found the meetings were “only about all kinds of reports, school budget report, principal report, and so forth,” which they could not understand.

Home-Based Social Capital

If Epstein was correct in that the educational model of “generalization of skills” inherently requires a close partnership between school and family to work to the advantage of children’s development, the loose connections between these Chinese parents and their children’s teachers would inevitably have an impact on their children’s learning and school experiences. Parenting practices within the home were especially interesting. With more autonomy at home, parents were more likely to adopt Chinese educational strategies. Yet, constrained by the dominant practices in the U.S. schools and the families’ situations, I suspected that those Chinese approaches could not be exercised to their full extent.

Most parents I interviewed held high expectation for their children’s educational attainment. They expected the children to receive a four-year college education at least; the college might not be as famous as Harvard or Yale, but certainly “not some community college.” They believed that education was highly correlated with one’s life chances. Mrs. Wang told her daughter: “If you want to live a decent life, you’ve got to study hard.” Mrs. Tao shared a similar view, but she thought education was even more crucial for one’s career in the U.S. than in China.

Mrs. Tao: In China, a student with graduate education may have the same salary as a person who only had a bachelor’s degree. This won’t happen in the U.S. People [in the U.S.] care a lot about your education and degrees. A Ph.D. graduate is meant to be paid at a certain level of salary. The degree does make a difference. In China, [people consider] social relations, acquaintances, nepotism, stuff like that.

Even though parents could not name specifically what professional path they would like their children to follow, they consciously or unconsciously had certain inclinations.

Mrs. Zhang: I asked [my son], “What do you want to do when you grow up?” “I want to be a policeman!” I said, “You are not strong enough.” The other day, he told me he wanted to be a doctor. I said, “Okay. You grow to be a doctor then.” He thought for a while and said, “No, that won’t do. I am afraid of

blood.” I laughed and asked again what he wanted to be. He thought for a long time and said, “I want to be a policeman.” I heard it and felt a little disappointed. I never gave it a serious thought on what he should be in the future, but when I heard that, I still couldn’t help my disappointment.

With parents’ high expectations and aspirations came strict monitoring and high pressure for school success. Parents defined success in the traditional Chinese way: academic success. Without in-depth and timely exchanges with the teacher, their knowledge about their children’s school experiences was limited to Friday folders, school reports and notices, and homework if there was any. They described U.S. education as “too relaxed” and “too indulging.” Following Chinese teaching approaches, parents believed that teachers should have sent a certain amount of homework so that children could review what they had learned during the day. Mrs. Wu used to ask the ESL teacher to send extra homework for her son to do at home. In lower grades, if teachers did not send homework, parents would give the children extra reading or math exercises to do after school. They would check the homework to see if the children completed it and understood the content. The homework assigned by parents included reading, math, and Chinese. It was said that teaching advanced math at home to their kids was a common practice among Chinese parents. They followed the elementary math textbooks bought from China to teach their children at home. Parents reported that the extra teaching at home improved their children’s school math performances. In higher grades, parents reported more difficulties in homework monitoring. Mr. Wang, whose daughter was in fifth grade, said that for some courses he could not understand the homework even if Meng asked him for help. A common complaint among these parents was about textbooks. The problem was there was no textbook for any class.

Mrs. Tao: There is no textbook whatsoever. In China, we have a book for Chinese, a book for math, and so forth, but they don’t. [The child] only brings back pieces of paper. There is no systematic curriculum. For example, we want to know what the child is supposed to learn this semester. In China, parents know what the children are taught in school. When the child needs us, we can help with her work. Here in the U.S., maybe [teachers] think there is no need for parents to teach the child. [Perhaps they think] children only need to learn in school; back home, they don’t need parents to help them....Well, if the child doesn’t learn well in school or didn’t receive a good grade, of course, parents want to help her. [But we] don’t know what to help, and how to help. We don’t know how the teacher teaches in class, like decimals, how the teacher explains to the kids. In China, [kids need to do] a lot of homework. [Kids here] don’t. One day they bring back one piece of paper, the second day they jump to another completely different

topic. Then after months have passed, they will come back again to the old topic.

Mr. and Mrs. Zhang's son, Hua, was only in first grade. Though the parents found themselves still capable to help with Hua's learning, they expressed serious concerns about the potential differences in their own teaching approaches and those of the teacher.

Mrs. Zhang: Hua brought back his reading materials from school. We took a look and thought they were too simple. Preschool kids can read them. Actually, we gave Hua much harder pieces to read at home. He has a [book of] children's Bible Stories. He can read that book. That one is much more complex than the ones given by school....

Mr. Zhang: However, I found an interesting thing. We think the kid is doing fine at home, learning much more advanced stuff than in school. But he didn't get his work 100% right in school. The highest grade is 1; he always gets 2s or 3s. What does this mean? It means his work still hasn't reached the teacher's requirement.

Mrs. Zhang: That's why I feel what we teach doesn't match what the teacher teaches in school....At home, he is doing advanced reading, advanced math....I think it is good enough for him. I don't know [why] that he doesn't do well in school. I think there is a mismatch between home education and school education. It is just not right!

Immigrant parents lack sufficient information about American schools' operation, teaching methods, and curriculum design. The benefits of advanced math class at home diminished along with the increase in students' school years. In higher grades, since children got used to the methods and teaching approaches in school, the incompatible content and methods they learned at home were quickly forgotten. Frequent communication with teachers, observation of classes, and active participation in school decision-making processes can bridge the gap in parents' knowledge about the U.S. education system. However, these Chinese parents did not adopt a proactive role in collaborating with the school and therefore rendered themselves disadvantaged in facilitating the children's ability to accomplish certain desired educational goals. The loose school-family ties diminished the expected partnership relations and benefits.

Among the interviewed parents, Mr. Wang held unique views on U.S. education and had an unusual definition of educational success. He thought American teachers did not care much about academic performance. Instead, they stressed cultural talents, like music, sports, and drawing. He did not think in U.S. society children had a big stake in education for their life chances.

Mr. Wang: When Meng first entered middle school, the school principal gave the parents a promise, which to me was very interesting. Unlike any of the

promises offered by schools in China, his promise was: every student would be willing to study in this school; if a child felt uncomfortable in this school, the parents should tell him and he would improve it. In China, the middle school principal would promise parents college enrollment rate, promise the kids the best, or at least one of the best, academic training in the city. Chinese schools promise those things. Here, [U.S.] schools don't guarantee that your kids learn best or receive good grades. They promise you the environment is comfortable and encouraging. This is the American promise. It is different. Americans say if you have a talent, develop it. If you don't, don't force yourself. If you say to teacher, I got a B and it was a problem. She won't admit this is a problem. Even if you have a C, it is not a problem either....Once I asked my colleague why some universities made a huge effort to run the basketball teams, and why some schools poured so much money into a school music band. Earlier, my daughter's school thought their music education was weak and dampened their reputation. So they hired a new principal and three music teachers. Later the school gave a concert. That involved a lot of efforts. I said to my colleague, why didn't the school put resources in teaching science, why did they do all this stuff. He told me if a school was poor in music or sports, it would be looked down upon. Sometimes, colleagues chatted about their kids' clubs, football team, or softball team. Parents would ask for leaves so as to take part in their kids' events. They made it a big deal. One time, a colleague missed his kid's activity because of a project at work; he raised up the issue in a group meeting with our boss. He said, for your project, I even missed the opportunity to attend my child's school event! The fact that he could so boldly complain to the boss indicated that such activities were very important to American families. Knowing this, sometimes when Meng wants to do something, I feel I shouldn't say no. I can't behave like we were still in China. I can't say "oh, you should study" or "you should do your homework." I think possibly we [Chinese] had different ideas [about education], and we should change them now.

His talk surprised me. I tried to say that American schools at least put some emphases on reading and math. This could be seen from the college entrance tests, SAT for instance. His response startled me even more.

Mr. Wang: In China, the career paths are limited. Everybody is competing to enter college in order to find a good job. It is different here. People don't have to go to college [to find a good job]. If you can get into a college, that is fine. If you fail, that is fine, too. The career choices are much wider than in China.

Viewing the U.S. society as ideally egalitarian, naturally he attributed less value to education in personal upward mobility, hence less emphasis on school achievement. Meng's school had an advanced math class in each grade, but she failed the entrance test. Mr. and Mrs. Wang did not know about the existence of the advanced class. When I was asking about tracking in Meng's school, they directly prompted the question to the child and then found out about the advanced math class. However, Mr. Wang did not regret not knowing this. "If Meng had wanted to get into the advanced class," he said, "she would have told me about it. If she did not want to be in that class, it was no use even if I made her."

Wang's wife did not agree with her husband's views. Such views may not be shared by the majority of immigrant Chinese parents, either. However, this single example could caution educators that, due to certain cultural stereotypes, parents may hold some misperceptions about dominant practices in the host culture, misconceptions that may jeopardize their children's development.

Intervening Factors

These parents were well educated. Some of them received graduate degrees in American institutions. Nevertheless, lacking connections with school and teachers, they failed to have their children take full advantage of their human capital. Both external conditions, such as time and the language barrier, and subjective perceptions of U.S. education hindered them from taking an aggressive role in their relations with their children's schools.

Time and Work

Parents complained about heavy work loads and insufficient time to spend with children or to visit school. All six fathers and three of the mothers were working full time. Except for the official parent-teacher meetings or cultural and social events that schools held for all parents, they seldom allocated extra time to meet the teacher individually and discuss with them children's school life. The time conflict partly resulted from financial pressures as well as these parents' immigrant status.

Mrs. Zhang: I feel that foreign parents [i.e., the American parents] spent much more time and money on their kids than Chinese parents. At least, the mothers, most of them don't work full time. So they can have plenty of time to take care of their kids. [Many of the mothers of my son's friends] only do part-time jobs. They have more time....It would be nice if I could take a part-time job only. I wish he [husband] could have a better and more stable income. A stable income, not necessarily very high, fifty thousand [per year] would be fine for us. Then I could find a part-time job and would be able

to visit my son's school a couple of times each week, to volunteer, to help, and to see how the Americans run their schools. At present, both of us have hectic work schedules. We don't have time to educate the child....I often feel exhausted. I am over-worked. I really wish I could work part-time, but my visa status won't allow that. That is a big problem!

Sometimes parents brought home their own stresses and frustrations from work, which could cast a worse influence on the children. The Tao's daughter, Ning, needed her father to help her with homework from time to time. Mr. Tao would blame her for learning too slowly in school.

Mrs. Tao: [My husband] usually gets very tired at work. Back home, he still needs to help [the daughter]. He is already stressed out during the day, and now sees the kid hasn't learned well in class. He would of course have a bad mood and ill temper. This sentiment is not good at all for the kid. She might feel hurt.

Although Mrs. Tao was a homemaker, her two-year-old young son occupied almost all her time and energy. Their income did not allow them to hire a nanny or babysitter. Teachman and colleagues (1997) found that parental income had a positive effect on reducing high school drop-out risk. However, such effect was involved in an interaction with parents' social capital, measured by parent-school and parent-children relations. At the same family income level, greater social capital enhanced the effect of income and less social capital diminished such effect on reducing the likelihood of dropping out of high school. It was unknown if the interaction between parental social and financial capital existed for other educational outcomes other than dropout risk. However, the experiences of these Chinese families led me to think it might be true. Financial restraints put employment pressures on both parents in the family and resulted in less time and energy available for children's education.

Language Barrier

English communication was considered to be a major problem for the parents. Even if some mothers did not have any job at all, they seldom paid visits to school because teachers "didn't understand what I was talking about." Sometimes children felt embarrassed by their parents' poor English level. Mrs. Wang had gone to her daughter's school once or twice. Each time she met someone in school, her daughter would say to the person "my mom doesn't speak English." Mrs. Wang felt that her daughter did not want her to speak in public, so she just became silent and never visited the school again. Mrs. Tao was the bravest one among the mothers. As mentioned earlier, she did not speak much English, but she kept volunteering as a class assistant until she gave birth to her second child.

Cultural Barriers

Unfamiliar with the explicit or hidden rules of the U.S. education system, these Chinese parents responded passively to school requirements. They received school notices about forthcoming events, requests for volunteering and donations, invitation to PTO meetings, and so on. Yet, without physical experiences in American schools, they could not empathize with the intangible cultural signals behind the activities per se. Some parents interpreted volunteer work as free labor needed by school. The view had some truth in it; but more importantly, with the volunteer request, the school and teachers made a gesture for community building, expecting parents' cooperation and support. Parents who missed this message would naturally see volunteer work as irrelevant to their children's well being.

As children entered higher grades, immigrant parents could not anticipate the possible decisions they and their children needed to make and, therefore, could not prepare ahead of time. Entering the middle school, for example, could be a big challenge for some children both emotionally and academically. Unless they knew of this potential challenge, parents could not get their children ready for it.

Perceptions of U.S. Education

Interestingly, though most parents agreed that closer relationships with teachers would benefit their children's learning and educational chances, and they admitted that their ties with school were not strong enough, they did not have anxiety about the status quo. On the contrary, they were quite contented with their children's educational outcomes. Compared with parents in China, these immigrant Chinese parents saw parent-teacher relations as holding less stake in their children's school success. Therefore, they deemed it not worth pursuing with heavy investments of time and energy.

Initially, I suspected that the rhetoric of meritocracy in the U.S. culture might lead the parents to believe that, unlike in China, generally in American society social connections were not pertinent to a person's education or career advancement. However, parents' responses dismissed my suspicions.

Mrs. Wu: Personal relations here are even more important than in China....

In the beginning, I did believe [in the U.S.] people got whatever they deserved. Nonsense! In my husband's company, the guy who is on good terms with their boss doesn't need to work as hard, and the boss could lay off any people, but not him!

Mr. Zhang: In my company, the Whites play with relationships, too. Like one guy, hates that guy, and then gossips to the manager about others. Just the same as in China, maybe not as blatant. You can't figure their relations out

on the surface. But in the back, they gossip about each other, flatter the manager, and so forth. It is all the same!

Parents all admitted to different degrees that social relations were important for adults and in business. Yet they did not think the same effect was applicable to U.S. schools. To maintain good relationships with teachers was a must in China, but was not necessary in the U.S., because they thought competition among Chinese students was fierce, and there the teachers had too large a power over students.

Mr. Zhang: Competition [in the U.S.] is not as strong as in China. Teachers in China have a great power over students. [They can] let you be a monitor, send you to partake in a contest, you know, make you the center of attention. Moreover, Chinese teachers often rank all kids from number one to number thirty-five! That is too much! In the U.S., they don't do it.

Mrs. Ding: [To please the teacher] is more than necessary [in China]. If the teacher has a prejudice toward your kid, or simply ignores your kid, or even speak to the child in a not-so-nice way, it can hurt the child's self-confidence. She may lose interest in school and in learning. Parents are all worried about that. So we give gifts to the teacher on holidays or festivals. Sometimes we have complaints, but we don't dare to speak out.

Mrs. Tao: [In China] if other parents give presents to the teacher and you don't, or you give the gift too late, the teacher treats your child differently. It happened in Ning's school [in China], too. Some parents had closer relations with teachers; in return, teachers would take better care of those kids.

In contrast to Chinese teachers, American teachers were regarded as "nice, caring, and treating students equally." They asserted with firmness that their children were not discriminated against by the teachers based on their ethnicity. Parents believed that regulations in the U.S. were more stringent than in China regarding teacher's power over students. They believed that U.S. teachers were well qualified and strictly followed the ethical codes of the profession. This perception dismissed parents' worries that teachers might treat other students better than their own children.

However, such perception alone was not sufficient to diminish parents' incentives to maintain a close relationship with teachers, because it could be even better if the teacher treated their children better than other students! This did not happen, for parents perceived no competition or a low level of competition among the American students. These parents mentioned that students in their children's class did not care about academic success. Mr. Wang, as reported earlier, took this to the extreme and thought the term "academic success" was meaningless.

Mr. Wang: Academic standing doesn't make a difference. It is the kid's interest that matters. If you like basketball, you can play basketball; if you don't like it any more, you can pick up another thing, say ping-pong.

In the U.S., children are assigned to certain public schools based on their residential district. Entrance into colleges is considerably easier in the U.S. than in China due to the smaller population and the larger number of institutions. Thus, students did not need to compete with their peers for the limited seats in the best elementary school or the best middle school and high school, as is the case in China. Seeing all these facts, parents lost their incentive to carefully build up and maintain relationships with teachers. As Mr. Ding put it, the outcome could not justify the investment!

Consciously or unconsciously, parents were still in a Chinese state of mind in evaluating family-school relations. Such relations were seen as an instrumental tool that oriented the needed but scarce resources to work to the advantage of their children in achieving educational goals. When the resources were believed to be abundant and competition relaxed, the tool was naturally rendered less valuable.

Conclusions

This study confirms Coleman's argument that human capital in parents will not transfer to the children automatically. The intergenerational transmission process is interrupted because immigrant parents are not familiar with norms and practices in the new education system. For immigrant families, parent-teacher relations do not function to impose shared norms on the children since the parents, lacking sufficient understanding about the new culture, may not acknowledge the norms in the host society. However, the higher volume of social capital inherent in the parents' networking with teachers can expedite the acculturation process both for themselves and for their children. For example, parents who volunteered to be a class assistant learned about American educator's teaching approaches and then could adopt similar methods when helping with their children's homework. In this sense, greater parent social capital – frequent exchanges with teachers on children's behaviors, homework monitoring, active volunteering, and so on – does facilitate the generation of human capital in children.

Relative to parent-teacher social connections in China, immigrant Chinese parents in the U.S. possess less social capital that they can mobilize to the advantage of their children's school success. In sharp contrast to parents in China, who aggressively seek and create opportunities to connect with teachers, these immigrant Chinese parents adopted a passive role in initiating contacts with

the school and teachers. The inconsistency in parent behaviors is not to be accounted for by the change of environment. In fact, both Chinese and American societies put high values on teacher-parent relations in their own unique ways. If immigrant parents simply followed the so-called mainstream practices, I would expect them to have much closer ties with teachers and schools. However, they did not. As Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) proposed, scholars should understand the agent's actions in the interactions between fields and habitus.

The comparatively loose ties between immigrant Chinese parents and teachers were not a signal that parents became indifferent to their children's educational achievement. Part of the habitus and rooted in their Chinese traditions, the parents' belief in the instrumental value of formal schooling had never changed. They still held high expectations for their children and valued academic success, diligence, and hard work. However, the parents changed their strategies regarding the use of the resources they possessed in response to the actual and perceived rules of the new field. The strategies that were considered to be effective in China lost their appeal in the U.S. Feasibility was a practical problem since the amount of resources the parents possessed (social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital) had changed in the new field setting. As shown previously, time, work, language, and cultural barriers all disadvantaged the parents' generation and accumulation of social capital.

One interesting finding of this study was that participants might not be responding to the actual rules of the field, but to the rules they perceive to exist in the field, which may or may not be true. The view that American schools were free of competition seemed to me to be a misconception. Such a view was a product of the interaction between habitus and the field. The image of competition they carried in their mind was from their Chinese school experiences: students in the same class were ranked from the first to the last; children were fighting for the limited seats in the best elementary, middle, or high schools; resources were scarce relative to the population. They found this image was not applicable to the U.S. schools and, therefore, deemed that competition was low in this education system. What they failed to see was the hidden competition that was invisible to them. I used the word "invisible" because competition did exist, not at the individual level, but between private and public schools, between rich and depleted school districts, between the wealthy and the poor. The misconception that the U.S. school system was inherently egalitarian influenced the parents' evaluation of each kind of capital they actually or potentially possessed and thus changed their strategies in using their resources. I stress the norms or practices that are perceived by the participants to be dominant in the field, because for each of them, his/her subjective interpretations of the rules in the field are the most salient to his/her actions.

As Bourdieu rightfully pointed out: “Social realities exist...twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). These dual realities refuse oversimplified deterministic views in understanding the process of social reproduction.

Future Research

It is worth mentioning that the parent-teacher relations in China described in this study may not be applicable to the rural areas in China. The group of parents I interviewed all came from large cities. Parents from rural areas may have different patterns of social connections than the urban parents in regard to children's education.

Also, social networking as a process of acculturation is found to be a mechanism that transforms social capital of parents into human capital of the children. It will be interesting to see if this mechanism works for other ethnic groups, both immigrants and minorities. For instance, some minority parents may not fully acknowledge the hidden curriculum in the school system due to their ethnic/cultural background; their contacts with school teachers can also be viewed as an acculturation process.

Researchers need to be aware that the amount of social capital possessed by the agent, and the strategies in activating social capital are not independent from the social structures and the dominant practices in the field. However, individual actions are not completely determined by the external social structures. Practitioners are actively interpreting the phenomena in the field through their past experiences, thus constructing the realities that are most salient to their own life. These constructed realities may be true or may not be true. They may work to the advantage of the individuals' well-being, or they may compromise their well-being. Studies that investigate the impact of these subjective perceptions will enrich the body of literature on social reproduction and social stratification.

References

- Ariza, E. N. (2000). Actions speak louder than words – or do they? Debunking the myth of apathetic immigrant parents in education. *Contemporary Education*, 71(3), 36-38.
- Ariza, E. N. (2002). Cultural considerations: Immigrant parent involvement. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 38(3), 134-137.
- Bhattacharya, G. (2000). The school adjustment of South Asian immigrant children in the United States. *Adolescence*, 35(137), 77-85.
- Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10(2), 141-163.

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carbonaro, W. J. (1998). A little help from my friend's parents: Intergenerational closure and educational outcomes. *Sociology of Education*, 71, 295-313.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- Croninger, R. G., & Lee, V. E. (2001). Social capital and dropping out of high school: Benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *Teachers College Record*, 103(4), 548-581.
- Dika, S. L., & Singh, K. (2002). Applications of social capital in educational literature: A critical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(1), 31-60.
- Epstein, J. L. (1990). School and family connections: Theory, research, and implications for integrating sociologies of education and family. *Organizations and Families*, 15(1-2), 99-126.
- Furstenberg, F. F., & Hughes, M. E. (1995). Social capital and successful development among at-risk youth. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 580-592.
- Goldenberg, C., Gallimore, R., Reese, L., & Garnier, H. (2001). Cause or effect? A longitudinal study of immigrant Latino parents' aspirations and expectations and their children's school performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 547-582.
- Janesick, V. J. (1998). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, E. (2002). The relationship between parental involvement and children's educational achievement in the Korean immigrant family. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 33(4), 529-540.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 37-53.
- Lindeman, B. (2001). Reaching out to immigrant parents. *Educational Leadership*, 58(6), 62-66.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (3rd ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McNeal, R. B. (1999). Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 117-144.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Morgan, S. L., & Sorensen, A. B. (1999). Parental networks, social closure, and mathematics learning: A test of Coleman's social capital explanation of school effects. *American Sociological Review*, 64, 661-681.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

- Teachman, J. D., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. (1997). Social capital and the generation of human capital. *Social Forces*, 75(4), 1343-1359.
- Zhang, C., Ollila, L. O., & Harvey, C. B. (1998). Chinese parents' perceptions of their children's literacy and schooling in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 23(2), 182-190.

Dan Wang is a doctoral student in the Department of Cultural Foundations of Education at Syracuse University. Her research interests include the educational experience of Chinese immigrants and the relation between education and the state in China. She has recently been working on her dissertation, an ethnographic study on how rural teachers in China, as capable moral agents, construct meanings of their work and negotiate their space in the top-down educational structure. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dan Wang, 1603 Hasbrouck Apts, Ithaca, NY, 14850, or address e-mail to dansyr@gmail.com

Low-Income, Urban Consumers' Perceptions of Community School Outreach Practices, Desired Services, and Outcomes

Julie O'Donnell, Sandra L. Kirkner, and Nancy Meyer-Adams

Abstract

Community schools require the active involvement of family and community members in the education and schooling of children both in the home and on the school site. However, schools often have difficulty effectively bringing low-income, diverse parents onto school campuses even when they are involved in their children's education in the home. This study explores outreach methods, desired services, and benefits of participation from the perspective of 113 low-income, urban, predominantly Latino, community school consumers. A multi-pronged community outreach approach which emphasizes personal relationships is likely to be most effective. Consumers participated in diverse programs, but their first priorities were programs that would benefit their children's learning and their home environment. Consumers reported positive changes in their children, themselves, their collaboration with the school, and, to some extent, in their community as a result of their involvement. The findings suggest that the successful engagement of urban parents and community residents on school campuses requires diverse outreach strategies. A wide variety of learning opportunities should also prove beneficial to children, families, and schools. Implications for practice are discussed.

Key Words: community schools, outreach, services, consumer perceptions, parental involvement, parent education, families, communities

Introduction

Community schools are defined as restructured academic programs that emphasize community involvement and provide services for parents and families including health centers, family resource rooms, after-school activities, cultural and community activities, and 24-hour access (Dryfoos, 1997, 2002; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). The school is seen as a resource to the entire community and perceives the community as integral to its efforts to increase student learning and enhance the development of children and youth. Many community schools also focus on improving the community as well (Dryfoos, 1999, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005). Typically, community schools are open in the afternoons, evenings, and weekends during the year and provide services to children, their families, and the entire community. Effective community schools result from purposeful partnerships that provide support and opportunities to students and their families as well as the neighboring community (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003). Consumer involvement, participation, and sanction are key ingredients in establishing a community school (Coltoff, Kaplan, Moses, & Stack, 1997). Given that consumer involvement on the school site is critical to the success of a community school, it is important to understand how best to accomplish this goal in low-income, urban communities. The purpose of this study was to investigate adult consumers' perceptions of community outreach strategies; programs; the outcomes of community school participation on children, families, the school, and the community; and how these perceptions varied by gender.

According to the Children's Aid Society (Coltoff et al., 1997), community schools should transform schools into new institutions that are not only focused on educating children but also on strengthening communities. The key ingredients of a community school include an emphasis on education, a long-term commitment to collaboration with social service providers as partners, integrated services, a high level of consumer and community involvement, incorporation of school day curriculum and learning, and a focus on community strengths (Coltoff et al., 1997; Dryfoos, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005). Research on community schools has shown that more consumer involvement in the educational process has led to better relationships with the teachers and school staff, a positive school climate, and a school culture that is more inviting (Desimone, Finn-Steveson, & Henrich, 2000; Dryfoos, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Epstein, 1991, 2004; Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006; Jordon et al., 2001; Marschall, 2006; Smith, 2006). Marschall found that schools that devoted efforts to "improving parent involvement and community relations had significantly higher levels of parent involvement in schools" (pp. 1069-70).

Consumer Involvement

With the recent emphasis in education legislation on parents becoming more involved on the school campus as well as in the home, schools and communities have looked at effective ways to engage parents on the school grounds (Marschall, 2006). Studies on parental involvement have shown that when parents are viewed as consumers of community resources and these resources are easily accessible, strengths-based, and culturally sensitive, consumers are more likely to participate in their children's education (Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Boyd & Correa, 2005; Howland et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2005; Smith, 2006). Some of the strategies that have been identified as most helpful in encouraging consumer involvement in schools are flexible scheduling of events and adult classes, child care, transportation, and services that the consumers need in order to improve their own and their children's lives (Marschall). Classes can range from parenting education to instructional/vocational classes such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Educational Development (GED) test-taking preparation to recreational/networking activities like salsa dancing and arts and crafts (Dryfoos et al., 2005; Epstein, 1991, 2004).

There is also a body of evidence that supports the supposition that when parent and community involvement at the school increases, children's academic achievement increases, relationships between parents and school staff improve, family functioning is more positive, and the school climate is more positive and supportive (Epstein, 1991, 2004; Howland et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2005; Marschall, 2006; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Smith, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Parents who are involved in their children's schooling can support and reinforce behaviors learned by their child at school as well as supply their children with good role models by learning new things themselves (Epstein, 1991, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, by having consumers involved at the community school sites, teachers can gain a better understanding of the sociocultural aspects of the community that can be used to strengthen and tailor curriculum (Moll, 1992).

Consumers' level of self-efficacy has also been found to be related to their level of involvement in their children's schools (Dryfoos, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Dupper & Poertner, 1997; Mapp, 2003). In other words, when consumers believe they have the knowledge and the skills to help their children succeed, they are more inclined to become involved both at home with school work and at the school (Desimone et al., 2000; Dryfoos, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Epstein, 1991, 2004; Jordan et al., 2001). As involvement in their children's school life increases, so do the consumers' positive attitudes toward education and their understanding of the school system (Jeynes, 2005;

Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999). This is particularly true when looking at the level of participation by male consumers.

While parent involvement in their children's education is often viewed as mainly the mothers' involvement, attracting fathers to become actively involved in their children's education is equally important (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE] & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2000). Children with fathers who are actively involved with the school (observing in the classroom, going to conferences, meeting with counselors) experience more educational success than children who only have mothers involved (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Moon-Ho, 2005). A father's involvement has also been shown to significantly impact his children's problem-solving capabilities and ability to demonstrate responsible and appropriate behaviors on both family and community levels. When males actively participate in their children's education, they demonstrate positive role modeling for their children, thus decreasing negative stereotypical gender roles. Activities that can help increase male participation include ones that reinforce fathers' contributions; generate specific interests such as leadership roles, mentoring other fathers, coaching, and team activities; and ones that help the fathers understand how important their participation is to their children's academic success (USDOE & USDHHS).

Challenges to Consumer Involvement

Research has shown that involvement on school sites among families of color and families with low incomes, where children are at increased risk for poor academic achievement, is often low to nonexistent (Dupper & Poertner, 1997; Fan, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). There may be many reasons why these parents do not come to school campuses. For example, low-income parents do not typically have employment that offers paid leave, the ability to take unexpected time away from work, or flexible schedules that allow them to get to the school during school hours, not to mention the constraints that often come with working more than one job (Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005; Smith, 2006). Other challenges to involvement at the school include lack of child care for other children, limited or no access to transportation, language barriers, and feeling uncomfortable in the school environment (Boyd & Correa, 2005; Chin & Newman, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). In addition, schools may not be designed to meet the needs of low-income, culturally diverse children and families, may not have teachers who adequately understand the culture of the community (Marschall, 2006), and may fail to actively encourage school-family collaboration (Howland et al, 2006). Parents are more likely to participate at schools that are welcoming, respectful, and empowering (Comer & Haynes, 1991)

and offer programs that encourage parental support in their children's schooling (Jeynes).

Stevenson-YMCA Community School (SYCS)

The Stevenson-YMCA Community School (SYCS), in an urban area of southern California, was originally funded in 1997 as an adaptation of the Children's Aid Society Community School Program model. This community school is a partnership of children, adult consumers (parents and community members), school staff, the YMCA (lead agency), community organizations, and the Department of Social Work at California State University, Long Beach. The goals of the SYCS are: (a) to improve school behavior and performance by providing high quality and integrated out-of-school programming for children and families; (b) to provide programming to strengthen parenting skills and promote self-sufficiency; (c) to develop grassroots community leaders with the skills to reduce barriers to positive child, family, and school functioning; and (d) to increase collaboration between the family, school, and community to improve children's learning. The SYCS operates from an empowerment perspective and emphasizes the many contributions families and communities make toward the education of children.

The SYCS offers a wide range of extended-day programs for children, families, and community members. During the 2005-2006 academic year, the extended-day programs served 520 adults. An extensive array of adult and family programs and opportunities for involvement are offered. Consumers are involved as learners (class participants), teachers (class instructors), and leaders (SYCS Advisory Board, PTA, etc). Classes include family literacy, family communication, school advocacy, parenting skills, how to help your child in school, college preparation, healthy lifestyles, English as a Second Language (ESL), cake decorating, flower arranging, and computer skills. The SYCS also offers a four-month community leadership program which is designed to develop the leadership skills of participants and requires a community improvement project. Once participants graduate, they may then join the alumni program. The SYCS received the Community Schools National Award for Excellence from the Coalition for Community Schools in 2006. All classes are offered in English and Spanish and free child watch is provided so parents with children can attend the classes. (For a more complete description of the classes offered, please contact the authors; see contact information at the end of the article.)

Ninety-eight percent of the children in the school are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Of the students, 78% are Latino, 15% are African American, 4% are Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 3% are Caucasian. Thirty-three percent of the parents of these children have less than a high school education.

The neighborhood in which the school is located has a high poverty rate, some of the highest rates of overcrowding and crime in the city, and close to 60% speak a language other than English in the home.

Methods

Data Collection

Consent forms and self-administered surveys, in English and Spanish, were distributed by university researchers to class members over a month's time. Trained, master's level research staff went to the school to administer the survey. They explained the purpose of the research to consumers in both English and Spanish, and participants signed informed consent forms prior to completing the surveys. Questions were read aloud by the researchers to ensure consumers who could not read were able to remain in the study. Informed consent letters and surveys were returned separately to ensure participant confidentiality. SYCS staff was not present while the data was collected. Of the 113 surveys completed, 104 (92%) were completed using the Spanish version.

Sample

Data were collected from consumers attending classes at the SYCS. This non-random, purposive sample consisted of 113 consumers. Of the consumers, 85 (75%) were female, 13 (11.5%) were male, two pairs (2%) answered as a couple, and 13 (11.5%) did not specify their gender. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the belief that the information was gathered for program planning purposes, the researchers decided to include the two surveys that were completed by couples. The vast majority of the sample ($N = 106$, 94%) was Latino, with equal proportions ($N = 2$, 2%) of African Americans, Caucasians, and multiracial. Analyses compared those in the sample with the larger population attending classes at that time who did not participate in the study. There were no gender or ethnic differences between the groups, suggesting the sample was representative of the larger consumer population.

Instrument

The survey was designed specifically for this study by university researchers to explore perceptions of community outreach methods, consumer service usage, consumer likelihood of future service use, and perceptions of changes in child and consumer behaviors. Although the content of the instrument was purposely designed to investigate the SYCS and drew on information from prior consumer focus groups at the school, the format of the survey was modeled after one used for a statewide study of culturally diverse Family Resource

Center consumers (O'Donnell & Giovannoni, 1999, 2000). The survey was originally designed in English, translated into Spanish by a researcher familiar with the local community, and then back-translated into English by another Spanish-speaker. Modifications were made to the Spanish version as appropriate. (Survey available from the authors upon request.)

Analyses

Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and to rank order class usage and preferences. Chi square analyses compared those in the sample with the larger school population to determine whether the sample was representative of the larger population. Chi square and independent t-tests were used for gender comparisons on outreach methods, service preferences, and perceived outcomes. The internal reliabilities of the scales were examined using Cronbach's alpha.

Results

Community Outreach Strategies

One of the purposes of the study was to learn about the ways consumers became involved with the SYCS. Of the 101 consumers responding, the most common source of community outreach was via a friend, neighbor, or relative ($N = 53$, 52%), followed by Parent Center visits ($N = 19$, 18%), community school staff outreach ($N = 10$, 10%), and school meetings ($N = 9$, 9%).

The second community outreach question asked respondents what made them want to become involved. Respondents were asked to circle all answers that applied from a prepared list. The most common response was to help their child succeed in school ($N = 59$, 52%) followed by to improve their English ($N = 32$, 28%), to learn about resources within the community ($N = 25$, 22%), to learn new skills ($N = 23$, 20%), and to improve their community ($N = 21$, 19%). Other responses included help with parenting skills ($N = 20$, 18%), to learn more about the school ($N = 14$, 12%), and to have fun ($N = 12$, 11%).

The third question asked for the consumers' opinion of the most effective ways to get others involved based on a prepared list of options. Consumers were asked to circle the top three most effective strategies. As shown in Table 1, the most common response was to recruit other consumers by making presentations at school meetings ($N = 44$, 41%), followed by outreach by consumers who were already involved ($N = 35$, 32%), sign-up fairs in front of school ($N = 33$, 30%), school-wide events ($N = 33$, 30%), and parent socials ($N = 32$, 30%).

Table 1. Most Effective Community Outreach Strategies for the Community School ($N = 108$)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Presentations at school meetings	44	41%
Outreach by consumers who are already involved	35	32%
Sign-up fairs in front of school	33	30%
School-wide events (pancake breakfast, multicultural fair, etc.)	33	30%
Parent socials	32	30%
Flyers	30	28%
After-school program family nights	30	28%
Personal outreach by community school staff	17	16%
Telephone calls by teachers	13	12%
Home visits	12	11%
Telephone calls by consumers	10	9%
Telephone calls by community school staff	8	7%

Consumers' Service Usage and Likelihood of Future Use

Consumers were asked to respond as to whether or not they had participated in a list of 30 SYCS adult and family activities. The most frequently attended classes and activities were ESL ($N = 53$, 47%), Community Leadership Institute ($N = 43$, 46%), aerobics ($N = 36$, 32%), family communication ($N = 33$, 29%), and family nights ($N = 26$, 23%). Consumers were asked how likely they would be to go to classes they had not yet attended. The responses were 3 "very likely," 2 "somewhat likely," and 1 "not at all likely." Table 2 displays those classes that consumers rated a 2.50 and above. It is worth noting, however, on average, consumers were at least somewhat likely to attend all of the classes. However, they were more likely to attend how to prepare your child for college ($M = 2.72$), talking with your children ($M = 2.70$), how to help children with homework ($M = 2.68$), and how to help your child succeed at school ($M = 2.68$). Overall, it appears that consumers were most interested in taking classes that were directly related to their child's academic success.

Table 2. Likelihood of Future Consumer Service Usages

Future Service	N	Mean	SD
Prepare your child for college	68	2.72	.64
Talking with your children	76	2.70	.59
Help children with homework	76	2.68	.62
Help your child at school	76	2.68	.62
First aid/CPR	75	2.64	.65
Help your child get better grades	75	2.64	.65
Improving parenting skills	75	2.63	.67
Technology	77	2.62	.67
In-home education	63	2.54	.69
Family night	65	2.54	.64
Stopping substance abuse	68	2.53	.72
Make your neighborhood safer	67	2.52	.70
Family communication	67	2.51	.72
Money/finances	71	2.51	.71
How to work with the school	69	2.51	.68
Child watch	68	2.50	.70

Perceptions of Change from Consumers

The next section of the survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which their children, themselves, the school, and the community had changed as a result of their SYCS participation. A list of potential changes was given and respondents identified the extent to which changes had occurred. The response categories were 1 “not at all,” 2 “somewhat,” and 3 “very much.” Table 3 displays these perceived changes. Consumers perceived the most changes in: gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment ($M = 2.64$), taught me how to help my child do better in school ($M = 2.63$), helped my children do better in school ($M = 2.61$), improved my child’s grades ($M = 2.58$), and showed me how I can help the school ($M = 2.58$).

Table 3. Consumer Perceptions of Changes Resulting from SYCS Participation

Change	N	Mean	SD
Gave a sense of pride and achievement	69	2.64	.64
Taught me how to help my child do better at school	67	2.63	.62
Helped my children do better in school	77	2.61	.65
Improved my child's grades	72	2.58	.60
Showed me how I can help the school	60	2.58	.59
Increased belief that I can make a difference	75	2.57	.62
Better role model for my children	65	2.57	.59
Helped me make new friends	76	2.57	.64
Helped my child learn social skills	70	2.56	.67
Improved my children's behavior	79	2.54	.64
Improved my parenting skills	71	2.52	.65
Gave family a fun and safe place to go	63	2.51	.62
Improved relationship/communication with teachers	63	2.49	.69
More involved with school	63	2.49	.67
Taught me about community resources	62	2.48	.70
Better cooperation with school staff	60	2.47	.72
Improved my community	60	2.47	.62
Taught me to be more healthy	63	2.44	.69
Improved personal skills	68	2.43	.78
Helped the community work toward common goals	57	2.42	.73
Gave me someone to talk to about my kids and my family	60	2.42	.70
Taught me about other cultures	63	2.37	.70
Better understanding of school expectations	62	2.37	.66
Improved neighborhood appearance	54	2.30	.72
Improved my English skills	80	2.30	.70
Taught me leadership skills	66	2.27	.78
Helped create parent advocates in the community	55	2.25	.78
Increased neighborhood safety	57	2.21	.77
Taught me job skills	47	2.15	.91

Gender Comparisons

To reduce the number of statistical comparisons when exploring gender differences in future service preferences, the classes were combined into six scales reflecting the types of services provided. The scales were family well-being ($\alpha = .70$), leadership/advocacy ($\alpha = .71$), child well-being ($\alpha = .95$), interpersonal well-being ($\alpha = .88$), physical well-being ($\alpha = .60$), and economic well-being

($\alpha = .77$). (Details of the items on each scale available from the author upon request.) Given the small size of the male sample and exploratory nature of the study, the results are reported at the .10 level. No significant differences were found between males and females on how they first became involved at the community school, what made them want to become involved, or the ways they believed were best to get other consumers involved. However, as shown in Table 4, males were somewhat more likely, in the future, to attend family well-being classes, $t(66) = 1.67, p \leq .10$, and leadership/advocacy classes, $t(65) = 1.80, p \leq .10$, than females.

Table 4. Gender Comparisons: Likelihood of Consumer Future Service Usage by Class Type Scale

Scale/Class Type	Males			Females		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Family well-being	2.78*	.37	9	2.45*	.57	59
Leadership/advocacy	2.75*	.37	9	2.43*	.52	58
Child well-being	2.68	.50	11	2.70	.47	71
Interpersonal well-being	2.53	.49	13	2.48	.57	75
Physical well-being	2.67	.47	11	2.57	.52	67
Economic well-being	2.61	.42	9	2.54	.62	59

* $p \leq .10$, ** $p < .05$

Scales were also constructed to examine gender differences in perceived areas of change. The scales were: perceived change in child behaviors ($\alpha = .86$), perceived change in consumer behaviors ($\alpha = .95$), perceived change in home-school connection behaviors ($\alpha = .91$), and perceived change in community/neighborhood-related behaviors ($\alpha = .94$). (Material that details the specific items on each scale available from the authors upon request.) No significant differences were found between males and females on perceived child, home-school, or community-neighborhood behavioral changes. However, as shown in Table 5, males were somewhat more likely than females to perceive positive changes in themselves, $t(53) = 1.75, p \leq .10$, as a result of SYCS participation.

Table 5. Gender Comparisons: Consumer Perceptions of Changes Resulting from SYCS Participation

Change/Improvement Area	Males			Females		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Child behaviors	2.67	.62	12	2.57	.50	51
Consumer/adult behaviors	2.67*	.38	11	2.39*	.49	44
Home-school connection	2.55	.45	11	2.45	.59	42
Community/neighborhood	2.65	.48	10	2.35	.59	42

* $p \leq .10$, ** $p < .05$

Discussion

Getting parents and community members involved at school can be challenging, and successful strategies to involve them can be different depending on various factors such as culture and economic status (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2006). The single most frequent way these consumers heard about the community school was from a friend, relative, or neighbor. The top consumer suggestions for involving others were to do presentations at school meetings, outreach by involved consumers, and sign-up fairs in front of the school. These findings suggest that the involvement of low-income, urban consumers may be highly dependent upon personal outreach efforts and relationship building. Thus, efforts such as “bring a friend to class” and including consumers in outreach efforts and presentations may prove beneficial in involving more parents and residents in community schools. This is consistent with other studies that have found personal outreach strategies and positive word of mouth from consumers may be the most effective ways of actively involving urban parents and community residents (O'Donnell & Giovannoni, 2000; Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003).

About 20% of consumers in this study first heard about community school programs through a Parent Center visit. Thus, establishing centers which are visible and welcoming may also be a useful involvement strategy to engage parents. Past research has similarly found that a warm and inviting school climate (e.g., having a warm family room with a homelike atmosphere and open door policy, the smell of fresh coffee) will help to get parents involved (Desimone et al., 2000; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Dryfoos et al. also suggested that creating comfortable spaces to converse and hiring parents or recruiting parent volunteers should increase the likelihood of on-campus consumer participation. Overall, the findings here suggest that a multi-pronged approach which emphasizes personal or small group, face-to-face community outreach strategies should prove most effective in bringing low-income consumers to school campuses.

The reasons people became involved with the community school varied somewhat; however, the single most commonly identified reason was to help their children be successful in school. Other reasons residents became involved included the desire to improve their English skills, to learn about community resources, and to learn new skills. Other studies have similarly found that parents become involved in their children's schools because they want to help their children to succeed in school (Mapp, 2003), to gain family and personal benefits (Aspiazu et al., 1998), and because they want a good education for their children (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002). This knowledge can be used to both

develop programs that are relevant to the community and to more effectively market the program. Program descriptions and outreach efforts should indicate that participation may lead to these desired outcomes. For example, class descriptions should include how participation in school programs is linked to better school outcomes for children or better schools. Classes to support children's academic success may be very helpful in attracting consumers, however, community and personal development classes may also be needed to attract diverse residents, and are likely to be popular as well. Broussard (2003) reported that it was imperative to establish groups, workshops, and resource centers for parents that facilitate information sharing, mutual support, empathy, and a sense of community between the parents and the school.

Respondents reported both their current and past service use as well as likelihood of future use. In terms of services used, ESL, Community Leadership Institute, aerobics, family communication, and family nights had the most participants. The most frequently requested classes were how to help your child prepare for college, talking with your children, helping children with homework, first aid/CPR, how to help your child at school, improving parenting skills, and technology. However, it is worth noting that consumers were at least "somewhat likely" to attend all of the classes that were listed. Offering a variety of classes, including recreational, social service, educational enrichment, and vocational has been found to result in greater school involvement among consumers (Dryfoos et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Although low-income consumers may primarily become involved in schools to improve their children's educational outcomes and to strengthen family relationships and situations, community schools will be more likely to attract consumers by offering a wide range of classes. The provision of diverse involvement opportunities that help develop the skills of residents are also necessary if community schools are to really make a difference in the communities and the schools they serve. Dryfoos et al. suggested that programs continuously assess parent needs and adjust workshop topics and class content appropriately. Thus, efforts like the study reported here should prove beneficial to program planners.

The survey results suggest that consumers' community school participation has the potential to positively influence children's academics. One of the greatest changes reported by these participants was that children's school performance improved. This suggests, from the perspective of the consumers, that adult participation in school-based classes can positively influence children's academic performance. These findings are similar to other studies (Dearing, Simpkins, Kreider, & Weiss, 2006; Jeynes, 2005; Smith, 2006) in which parental involvement at the school resulted in increases in children's motivation and academic success.

The evidence also suggests that parenting skills and perceived self-sufficiency may be improved through consumer participation in community school programs. On average, all of the consumers' behavior changes were rated between somewhat and very much. Consumers rated their highest levels of change in sense of pride and accomplishment, ability to help their child in school, ability to be a better role model for their children, and in the belief that they can make a difference. It appears that community school participation can successfully empower consumers and help them become better parents and role models for their children. Past research has also shown that involvement at their children's school gave parents a sense of accomplishment and a feeling that they were better able to help and advocate for their children (Dryfoos, 2002; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003; Smith, 2006).

School-home collaboration may sometimes be lacking in urban areas (Howland et al., 2006). One of the major goals of a welcoming school environment is to create mutual trust and respect among the school community (i.e., parents, teachers, school staff, principal; Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003). The consumers in the current study noted improved family and school collaboration. In fact, the level of improvement in this area was second only to child improvement. Hopefully, this improved knowledge of how consumers can assist the school also translated into actual assistance, which could suggest that community schools, by involving residents, can contribute to systemic as well as individual level change. Furthermore, it is encouraging that consumers reported becoming more involved in the school and improved relationships with teachers and school staff. A positive home-school connection is an important one for schools to achieve since it helps to establish a sense of shared responsibility for children's education (Bowman, 1994).

Community schools are often committed to the development of community leaders and advocates who have the skills to make positive changes in both the school and the larger community (Mendez, 2005). Although the area of community change was rated lowest by the consumers in the current study, every indicator was rated by consumers as more than somewhat improved. The highest rated community changes were in making new friends, learning about community resources, and improving the community. The lowest mean ratings were on increasing neighborhood safety and creating parent advocates. Lopez (2003) found that when parents are presented with opportunities to learn and engage in leadership activities, parents with little or no previous involvement may develop into articulate and forceful community leaders. Quezada (2003) found that parents who participated in leadership training improved their advocacy skills and self-confidence and were then able to bridge gaps between the

school and the community. The findings here suggest that community schools can provide learning and involvement opportunities that help parents to make a difference in the lives of their communities, as well.

Since several past studies have shown the importance of father participation in their children's education (McBride et al., 2004; USDOE & USDHHS, 2000), gender differences in future service usage and in perceptions of changes were explored in the current study. Fathers indicated they would be somewhat more likely to attend classes involving leadership/advocacy roles, and more family-interactive classes. Males also reported more improvements in their own behaviors from community school participation than females. Thus, efforts to involve fathers in school-based programs may consider offering more family programming and leadership training and opportunities. Recruitment efforts should also include males and highlight the positive changes that may result from fathers becoming involved in schools.

Conclusions

The data presented here are part of a larger, comprehensive study which is also investigating teacher perceptions of family involvement, the effects of community school participation on children's academic performance and school behaviors, and the effects of consumer involvement in leadership training. All of these evaluation efforts should prove useful to those interested in developing community schools. There were some limitations to the current study. First, the sample was non-random which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the survey was developed for the study so the reliability and validity of the instrument is unknown. Third, the sample size was somewhat small, so gender findings should be interpreted with caution. However, community schools appear to have the ability to positively influence children, families, schools, and communities. The results also suggest that low-income, urban consumers are interested in and committed to the education of their children and will come to school campuses if multiple outreach strategies and involvement opportunities are used to attract and retain those consumers.

References

- Aspiazu, G. G., Bauer, S. C., & Spillett, M. (1998). Improving the academic performance of Hispanic youth: A community education model. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 22(2), 103-123.
- Blank, M. J., Melaville, A., & Shah, B. P. (2003). Community schools improve outcomes for students, families, schools and communities. *State Education Standard*, 4(2), 36-40.
- Boyd, B., & Correa, V. I. (2005). Developing a framework for reducing the cultural clash between African American parents and the special education system. *Multiple Perspectives*, 7(2), 3-9.

- Bowman, B. T. (1994). Home and school: The unresolved relationship. In S. L. Kagan & B. Weissbourd (Eds.), *Putting families first: America's family support movement and the challenge of change* (pp. 51-72). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Broussard, C. A. (2003). Facilitating home-school partnerships for multiethnic families: School social workers collaborating for success. *Children & Schools*, 25(4), 211-222.
- Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E., & Wolos, C. (2006/07, Winter). Family involvement in elementary school children's education. *Family Involvement Research Digest*, 2. Retrieved September 20, 2007 from <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/family-involvement-in-elementary-school-children-s-education>
- Chin, M. M., & Newman, K. S. (2002). *High stakes: Time, poverty, testing and the children of the working poor*. New York: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved March 28, 2007 from <http://www.springerlink.com/content/v52k8534hx171861/>
- Coalition for Community Schools. (2003). *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools* (Executive Summary). Washington, DC: Author.
- Coltoff, P., Kaplan, M., Moses, C. W., & Stack, K. (1997). *Building a community school* (Rev. ed.). New York: Children's Aid Society.
- Comer, J. P., & Haynes, N. M. (1991). Parent involvement in schools: An ecological approach. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(3), 271-277.
- Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H. (2006). Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 653-664.
- Desimone, L., Finn-Stevenson, M., & Henrich, C. (2000). Whole school reform in a low-income African American community: The effects of the CoZi Model on teachers, parents and students. *Urban Education*, 35(3), 269-323.
- Dryfoos, J. G. (1997). School-based youth programs: Exemplary models and emerging opportunities. In R. J. Illback & C. T. Cobb (Eds.), *Integrated services for children and families: Opportunities for psychological practice* (pp. 23-52). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Dryfoos, J. G. (1999). The role of the school in children's out-of-school time. *Future of Children*, 9, 117-134.
- Dryfoos, J. G. (2002). Full-service community schools: Creating new institutions. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(5), 393-399.
- Dryfoos, J. G., Quinn, J., & Barkin, C. (2005). *Community schools in action: Lessons from a decade of practice*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Dupper, D. R., & Poertner, J. (1997). Public school and revitalization of impoverished communities: School-linked, family resource centers. *Social Work*, 4, 415-421.
- Epstein, J. L. (1991). Effects on student achievement of teacher practices of parent involvement. In S. Silvern (Ed.), *Advances in reading/language research, Vol. 5: Literacy through family, community and school interaction*. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Epstein, J. L. (2004). Meeting NCLB requirements for family involvement. *Middle Ground*, 8(1), 14-17.
- Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 70(1), 27-61.
- Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, C. (2002). *Strong neighborhoods, strong schools: Successful community organizing for school reform*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Retrieved September 7, 2007 from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/72/1e.pdf

- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence. The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved April 4, 2007 from <http://www.sedl.org/connections>
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.
- Howland, A., Anderson, J. A., Smiley, A. D., & Abbott, D. J. (2006). School liaisons: Bridging the gap between home and school. *The School Community Journal*, 16(2), 47-68.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3), 237-269.
- Jordan, C., Orozco, E., & Averett, A. (2001). *Emerging issues in school, family, & community connections*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved April 4, 2007 from <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/emergingissues.pdf>
- Lopez, M. E. (2003). *Transforming schools through community organizing: A research project*. Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved September 6, 2007 from <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/transforming-schools-through-community-organizing-a-research-review>
- Lopez, M. E., Kreider, H., & Coffman, J. (2005). Intermediary organizations as capacity builders in family educational involvement. *Urban Education*, 40, 78-105.
- McBride, B., Schoppe-Sullivan, S., & Ho, M. H. (2005). The mediating role of fathers' school involvement on student achievement. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 26, 201-216.
- Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *The School Community Journal*, 13(1), 35-64.
- Marschall, M. (2006). Parent involvement and educational outcomes for Latino students. *Review of Policy Research*, 23(5), 1053-1076.
- Mendez, H. (2005). Parent involvement and leadership in action. In J. G. Dryfoos, J. Quinn, & C. Barkin (Eds.), *Community schools in action* (pp. 41-56). New York: Oxford Press.
- Moll, L. C. (1992). Bilingual classroom studies and community analysis: Some recent trends. *Educational Researcher*, 21(2), 20-24.
- O'Donnell, J., & Giovannoni, J. M. (1999). Ethnic differences in service use, preferences, and service delivery aspects among consumers and potential consumers of family resource centers. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 7(3/4), 1-18.
- O'Donnell, J., & Giovannoni, J. M. (2000). Consumer perceptions of outreach and marketing strategies for family resource centers. *Journal of Community Practice*, 8(2), 71-87.
- Quezada, T. (2003). *Faith-based organizing for school improvement in the Texas borderlands: A case study of the Alliance School initiative*. Research Digest. Retrieved September 20, 2007 from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/faith-based-organizing-for-school-improvement-in-the-texas-borderlands-a-case-study-of-the-alliance-school-initiative>
- Quezada, T., Diaz, D. M., & Sanchez, M. (2003). Involving Latino parents. *Leadership*, 33(1), 32-34, 38.
- Sanders, M. G., Epstein, J. L., & Connors-Tadros, L. (1999). *Family partnerships with high schools: The parents' perspective* (CRESPAR Report 32). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved April 12, 2007 from <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report32.pdf>
- Sheldon, S. B., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2004). Partnership programs in U.S. schools: Their development and relationship to family involvement outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15, 125-148.

- Smith, J. G. (2006). Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case study. *School Community Journal*, 16(1), 43-56.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1994). *Strong families, strong schools: Building community partnerships for learning*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *A call to commitment: Fathers' involvement in children's learning*. Washington, DC: Authors.

Julie O'Donnell is a professor and director of research at the Department of Social Work and Child Welfare Training Centre, California State University, Long Beach. Her primary areas of expertise and research are in school social work, community schools, afterschool programs, family involvement, community mobilization, and child welfare.

Sandra L. Kirkner is a research associate at the Child Welfare Training Centre, Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach. Her primary areas of interest are in research and statistics, including quantitative and qualitative analyses on child welfare research projects.

Nancy Meyer-Adams is an assistant professor at the Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach. Her research interests include school social work practice, mental health issues of children and families, and the scholarship of teaching.

Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Sandra L. Kirkner, Child Welfare Training Centre, Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach, 6300 E. State University Drive, Suite 180, Long Beach, CA, 90815; or e-mail skirkner@csulb.edu.

A Review of “Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships”

Jeffrey A. Anderson and Allison Howland

Key Words: book review, family involvement, home-school partnerships, parents, schools, community, educators, bake sale

Knowing that it is important to closely involve families in the schooling and education of their children is not new. Advocates, educators, community organizers, and parents have been calling for more and better family-school partnerships for decades. For example, in the mid-1980s, Anne Henderson and her colleagues published *Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide to Working with Parents* (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). On the other hand, it is more recent that a cohesive body of empirical evidence has been identified and disseminated indicating, with some degree of conclusiveness, that such partnerships can positively impact a whole host of school outcomes. Indeed, a growing number of studies highlight the positive associations between parent involvement in schools and their children's social and emotional development and academic achievement (Baker & Soden, 1997; Catsambis, 1998; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Fan & Chen, 1999; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Shaver & Walls, 1998; VanVoorhis, 2001). Focusing on urban settings, Jeynes (2005) reported that the relationships between academic achievement and parent involvement hold across gender, race, socioeconomic status, and academic ability of students, and that these positive relationships demonstrate statistical significance not just for academic ability overall, but also for standardized tests, GPA, and other academic measures. As Henderson and her colleagues (2007) point out, “The more the relationship between families and the school is a real partnership, the more student achievement increases” (p. 3).

Given such findings, along with the current pressures on schools (e.g., No Child Left Behind; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) to reduce achievement gaps and enhance the academic achievement of all students, the need for public schools to actively seek and increase authentic forms of parental involvement is obvious (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006). In their new book, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), the authors provide a research-based, practical set of strategies designed to help schools move beyond the cursory, static types of relationships with parents that have been so common in our K-12 schools, toward the development and sustainment of meaningful, dynamic relationships among schools and families.

Building directly from the research-focused monograph, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), *Bake Sale* provides readers with a compilation of innovative strategies, tools, and assessments that can be used immediately by any school to start connecting with families. The book is made up of four sections. Part I includes two chapters on why school-family partnerships are so important. Part II has two chapters that focus on how schools can go about building partnerships with families. Part III is a series of five chapters that examine the research base for school-family partnerships from a variety of different perspectives. The final section, Part IV, contains two chapters describing the wealth of resources that are available to schools and families for creating and maintaining partnerships. A real strength of this book is that each chapter after the first includes one or more checklists the reader can use right away to assess the current status of her or his school's partnerships. These assessments will be invaluable to school personnel as they work to understand the present state of their relationships with families and endeavor to improve and enhance the quality of those relationships.

The first chapter sets the context for the book, reminding the reader why school-home partnerships should be a central part of how a school functions. In Chapter 2, four levels of partnership in which schools can operate are presented: fortress; come-if-we-call; open-door; and partnership. Using rubrics supplied in the text, school personnel rate their school and then use this information to prepare the school for deeper relationships with families and also with the community. Chapter 3 presents a set of four core beliefs that schools need to adopt to move forward. Each of these beliefs includes a checklist and set of action steps for school personnel to assess and monitor their progress. The chapter also describes an empirically supported theoretical model that is important for understanding parental involvement in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Developed by Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard

Sandler, the model posits three psychological constructs that explain why parents become involved in their children's education: (a) role construction (i.e., what parents believe they should do); (b) self-efficacy (i.e., what parents believe they can do) within the context of their children's education; and (c) parent perceptions of invitations (i.e., the degree to which parents feel the school welcomes, values, and expects their involvement). Of the three, invitation appears to be the most important (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Additionally, a fourth construct, parents' perceived life context (i.e., perceptions of other life demands that mediate school involvement), has been added to this model (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Though not discussed in this text, parents' perceived life context appears especially relevant for schools to engage families with increased demands on their time and energy, such as juggling multiple jobs, single parenting, and having children with disabilities.

Chapter 4 helps schools learn how to cultivate common ground with families by identifying mutually held interests, such as students' academic achievement. Specific to the development of mutually trusting relationships between parents and schools is Mapp's "joining process" (2003) which includes (a) welcoming parents into the school, (b) honoring their participation, and (c) connecting with parents by focusing on children and their learning. The book explains the joining process and uses examples to facilitate its implementation in any school. Chapter 5 extends the discussion of the joining process, describing how schools can put the focus of school-family partnerships specifically on learning and academic progress. One interesting example the authors share is the Parent Academic Liaison Program (PAL) in San Diego. PAL places certified teachers in high risk elementary schools to work to establish and sustain comprehensive parent involvement in these schools. Another powerful aspect of this chapter is the section on how schools can use student achievement data to drive school-family relationships, such as the "Five Steps for Focusing Your (School) Compact on Learning" (p. 102).

Chapter 6 is arguably the best chapter of the book. Even schools that are already successfully partnering with families from diverse ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds will gain new ideas from this part of the book. And for schools that are not presently successful, the chapter offers not only a compelling rationale for relationship building, but similar to the rest of the book, provides processes and procedures for moving forward regardless of current status. The section on getting to know a community and its assets may be especially helpful for schools that are unsure of how or where to begin to bridge cultural disconnects between school personnel and families. Chapter 7 focuses more on how to help parents become advocates for their children and themselves than it does on dealing with "problem parents" – something implied by

the chapter's title. Although there are several sections that examine working with angry or "pushy" parents, the central idea underlying this chapter is that by helping families understand how schools operate, the potential of having parents who are frustrated or irate is reduced. Like the rest of the book, the chapter provides numerous tips from principals and "how to" examples.

Chapter 8, "Sharing Power," describes ways in which schools can more meaningfully involve families in schools. The focus is on understanding the power differentials that can exist between schools and families and then working to replace barriers with more democratic decision-making processes. Perhaps best summarized by the authors' point, "In a school community, action trumps talk" (p. 189), this chapter starts by describing how to support parents in becoming effective leaders in a school, followed by how to involve parents in action research projects in the school, and then moves to how to make connections among parents, the school, and community organizations. The authors remind the reader that democracy is not always easy and often is messy and uncomfortable, but that transparency brings with it many benefits for a school community.

Scaling up, the subject of chapter 9, provides several case examples of school districts that have made the commitment to build and maintain family partnerships in their schools. These real world examples serve to reiterate the importance of having a family-focused philosophy in the school. The role of leadership, starting with the superintendent, is stressed throughout the chapter. The last two chapters, 10 and 11, provide lists and descriptions of resources and tools that schools and families can access to implement and extend the ideas described throughout the text. This information will be useful to schools with well established family-school partnerships as well as for schools just beginning to develop connections with families. The book itself serves as such a practical tool that schools newer to the process will not need to spend a lot of time with this last section until they have worked through the first three sections of the book.

The strengths of this text lie in its practicality. Anyone can pick up and begin to use this book immediately. The authors are pushing educators beyond notions of using best practices to using evidenced-based practices. No doubt, education has a long way to go in this regard, but this text with its focus on research supported strategies is a good start.

Like any such text, this book is not without its limitations, one being that is not always clear which ideas are research-based and which ideas would be better considered as best practices. However, the text is rich with cited research studies making this not only an ideal book for school personnel, but also a useful book for teacher preparation programs. In addition, although the strategies

and concepts presented can be successfully implemented across grade levels, the book is primarily situated within an elementary school context. A specific examination of the unique challenges related to parent involvement at the secondary level would have been useful for educators, particularly with secondary parents perceiving reduced invitations for involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Perhaps the most obvious weakness of the book was the lack of attention given to partnerships with families having children with disabilities. Unfortunately, even though partnering with families has been a key component of federal special education law since its inception in the mid 1970s, there has been a problematic lack of attention given to this area.

Still, Henderson and her colleagues have made an invaluable contribution to the field; one that should be read by every individual seeking to improve K-12 education. In the authors' own words, schools can ill-afford to neglect family, school, and community partnerships:

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 2)

References

- Baker, A. J. L., & Soden, L. M. (1997). *Parent involvement in children's education: A critical assessment of the knowledge base*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Catsambis, S. (1998). *Expanding knowledge of parental involvement in secondary education – Effects on high school academic success* (CRESPAR Report 27). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved May 5, 2006 from <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report27.pdf>
- Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2005). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(3), 164-175.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2000). Connecting home, school, and community: New directions for social research. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of education* (pp. 285-306). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (1999). *Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis*. Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Gutman, L. M., & Midgley, C. (2000). The role of protective factors in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29(2), 223-248.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

- Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York: The New Press.
- Henderson, A. T., Marburger, C. L., & Ooms, T. (1986). *Beyond the bake sale: An educator's guide to working with parents*. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.
- Howland, A., Anderson, J. A., Smiley, A. D., & Abbott, D. J. (2006). School liaisons: Bridging the gap between home and school. *The School Community Journal*, 16(2), 47-68.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 92(2), 310-331.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Education Research*, 67(1), 3-42.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., et al. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3), 237-269.
- Mapp, K. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *School Community Journal*, 13(1), 35-64.
- Shaver, A. V., & Walls, R. T. (1998). Effect of Title I parent involvement on student reading and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 31(2), 90-97.
- VanVoorhis, F. L. (2001). Interactive science homework: An experiment in home and school connection. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(627), 20-32.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *The No Child Left Behind Act*, Public Law 107-110. Washington, DC: Author.

Jeffrey A. Anderson is associate professor of special education and research faculty in the Center for Adolescent and Family Studies at the School of Education, Indiana University, Bloomington. His research focuses on understanding and improving coordination among families, social service agencies, and schools, as well as improving educational and social outcomes for children with emotional and behavioral challenges. Correspondence concerning this review should be addressed to: Jeffrey Anderson, Room 3232, 201 N. Rose Ave., W. W. Wright Education Building, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, or to jander2@indiana.edu.

Allison Howland is a visiting professor and Program Director of Special Education at Indiana University Purdue University, Columbus. Her research focuses on family engagement and its association with improved academic and social/behavioral outcomes for students, particularly students with disabilities.