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The School Community Journal
121 N. Kickapoo Street
Lincoln, IL 62656 USA
Phone: 217-732-6462, ext. 30
Fax: 217-732-3696
E-mail: editor@adi.org

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 two copies of the manuscript; an abstract of no more than 250 words; key word list; a one paragraph description of the author; and a phone number, fax number, and e-mail address where the author can be reached to:

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Lincoln, Illinois 62656

Please send an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment to editor@adi.org OR include a copy of the manuscript on diskette (in Word if possible, APA format with titles italicized). The cover letter should state that the work is not under simultaneous consideration by other publication sources. Manuscripts are returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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 on a separate page and in a separate electronic file.

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The archives to the journal may be accessed at www.adi.org

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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. Please see editorial policy on page 2 for submission information.

Editorial Review Board

In memory of Pam Kay of the University of Vermont, Burlington,
with grateful rememberance of her faithful service to this review board.

Editor's Comments

This issue opens with Brown and Beckett's case study of African American educational leadership, written with reference to the historical context of African American school and community leadership. I found this article enlightening and inspiring, and I hope you will, too. It is followed by Msengi's thoroughly cross-referenced examination of the perceptions of a set of African American students, their teachers, and their family members regarding literacy practices.

Next is a study of Mexican-origin fathers and their involvement in their children's home and school learning by Lopez. It has some very interesting findings, some in keeping with past studies, and some new findings, as well. In the following article, Sutterby, Rubin and Abrego describe a university's program to connect preservice teachers with Latino families as part of an after-school tutoring program. While it describes a unique context, their practices may also be useful when applied in other settings. In particular, the use of conversation prompts and reflection seem to be promising techniques that could be used with teachers at any level who need more practice and confidence in connecting with the families of their students.

Then comes Ferreria's article about a different kind of university-school district partnership, this one utilizing non-teaching majors. Science, math, and engineering majors assisted middle school teachers, facilitating unique help and experiences for all involved.

Finally, Sil provides a thought-provoking examination of social capital and how it might function to reduce the possibilities of college access for certain groups of students. She calls for carefully examined and balanced policy and practice to ensure more equitable access for all students.

The School Community Journal is preparing to switch formats. In the future, beginning with Volume 17, Number 2 (Fall/Winter 2007), the journal will be available online only, as a free, open-access journal. It is our hope that this format will make the important topics we cover more widely available to practitioners, policymakers, and the research community. Our archives will also be available at www.adi.org. We will continue to strive for the highest possible quality through our blind peer review process, and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

Lori Thomas
May 2007

Building Community in an Urban School District: A Case Study of African American Educational Leadership

Lionel H. Brown and Kelvin S. Beckett

Abstract

This case study contributes to a small but growing literature on African American educational leadership. Previous studies have shown that, building on a history of segregated schools for Black students staffed by Black teachers in which strong school-family-community relations were essential for the survival of their schools, Black principals understand the predominantly disadvantaged African American students and families they serve and communicate well with them. The danger of this analysis in the present context of urban diversity is that it leaves open the question of whether Black educational leaders understand and communicate well with other ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic groups. The present study shows how an African American principal, building on a practice of school and community leadership in separate Black education that involved extensive engagement with White school district officials and other individuals and groups, was able to facilitate communication between disadvantaged Black families and middle-class White teachers and school district officials, with the result that all stakeholders worked together effectively to develop policies and programs that improved student behavior and academic achievement.

Key Words: alternative education, at-risk students, Blacks and education, parent involvement, community-school collaboration, minority principals, school discipline

Introduction

John Dewey believed that "There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication" (1916/1944, p. 4). According to Dewey, humans "live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (p. 4). Even as urban school districts strive to accommodate increasingly diverse linguistic populations, they still have difficulty serving different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. When looked at from a Deweyan perspective, research on student and parent involvement in education indicates that urban schools are not public institutions which poor African American families and middle-class White families possess in common. Not only are middle-class White families more involved in schools than disadvantaged African American families, they are also involved in different ways. Building stronger school communities in urban districts has been shown to have positive impacts on student behavior and academic achievement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). But if Dewey is correct and schools come to be possessed in common through communication, an important measure of educational leadership is the ability of urban principals to facilitate communication between ethnic and socioeconomic groups who are involved in schools to different extents and in different ways.

This case study contributes to a small but growing literature on African American educational leadership. Previous studies have shown that Black principals, building on a history of segregated schools for Black students staffed by Black teachers in which strong school-family-community relations were essential for the survival of their schools, understand the predominantly disadvantaged African American students and families they serve and communicate well with them (Bryant, 1998; Carr, 1997; Case, 1997; Loder, 2005; Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1990; McGee Banks, 2001; Morris, 1999, 2004; Pollard, 1997; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). The danger of this analysis in the present context of urban diversity is that it leaves open the question of whether African American educational leaders understand and communicate well with other ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic groups. From a critical race perspective, researchers must guard against "interrogating" and "exposing" racism in the area of Black leadership generally, only to leave it unquestioned and undisturbed in the area of Black leadership in diverse school communities (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003). The present study shows how a Black principal, building on a practice of school and community leadership in separate Black education that involved extensive engagement with White school district officials and other individuals and groups, was able to facilitate

communication between disadvantaged Black families and middle-class White teachers and school district officials with the result that all stakeholders worked together effectively and developed policies and programs that improved student behavior and academic achievement.

Background

Barriers to communication across ethnic and socioeconomic lines are being erected in an atmosphere of mutual defensiveness and distrust between increasing numbers of White middle-class teachers and increasing numbers of disadvantaged African American students and parents in urban school districts (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Miretzky, 2004; Weininger & Lareau, 2003). Many Black parents believe that teachers blame them for their children's discipline problems and poor academic performance, and that their children's failure in school reflects badly on them as African Americans (Calabrese, 1990; Cook & Fine, 1995; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Fine, 1995; Moles, 1993). At the same time, White teachers fear that parents hold them responsible for their students' failure, and that their inability to discipline and motivate disadvantaged Black students may reflect a deep-seated and unconscious racism (Arnett Ferguson, 2000; Gentry & Peale, 1994; Hale-Benson, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that urban schools could do more to create opportunities for extended, meaningful, and positive communications between disadvantaged parents and teachers (Calabrese, 1990; Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Fields-Smith, 2005; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). The only opportunities generally available now are short parent-teacher conferences and special meetings set up when a child is having academic problems, neither of which seemed designed to encourage teachers and parents to work through existing barriers to meaningful communication (Bloom, 2003; Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

An opportunity to overcome ethnic and socioeconomic barriers occurred in Cincinnati in the early 1990s when dramatic increases in student suspension rates led to a city-wide focus on discipline in the public schools. Cincinnati Public Schools' (CPS) student suspensions increased from 9,591 in 1990 to 20,600 in 1992 (Erkins, 2002), and expulsions involved students being removed from school for up to 80 days at a time (Brown, 2004). In addition, a broad-based community review sponsored by the CPS Office of Student Discipline found discipline problems to be a major contributor to the district's poor student attendance record and high dropout rate (Brown, 1992). The response

in the city to this perceived crisis in student discipline was overwhelmingly negative: an "inventory" of the school district conducted by local business leaders was highly critical of CPS disciplinary policies and programs (Brown, 2004); a Mayor's Summit on Education, Discipline, and Truancy strongly recommended that the district find ways other than suspension and expulsion to address the needs of disruptive students; an external assessment by Junious Williams found student suspensions and expulsions to be too high (Bradley, 1994); and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers adopted a policy of zero tolerance of student misconduct – infractions not handled properly were to be reported to the union representative for follow-up with the principal. Nor did the criticism end here. The issue of student discipline was complicated by the fact that in Cincinnati, as in other urban districts, African American students were being suspended and expelled at higher rates than White students (Brown, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002) and thus the response to the crisis in the city's Black community was doubly critical: In 1991, NAACP lawyers convinced a federal court judge that the CPS was not in compliance with the terms of a school desegregation agreement, in part because its efforts to ensure race-neutral disciplinary practices were insufficient (Brown, 2004); and, in 1993, a local congress of inner-city ministers successfully campaigned against a proposed school tax levy to protest the district's continuing high rates of suspension and expulsion among African American students (Bradley).

During this period, the lead author of the present article was the Cincinnati Public Schools' deputy superintendent. His responsibilities included district internal compliance officer for the school desegregation agreement, director of the office of student discipline, and principal of an alternative school for at-risk elementary students. In reflecting on his years of service at the district level and trying to give voice to what he experienced, this author came to see that the challenge he faced at the time was to bring school board members, teachers, parents, and community members together and encourage them to develop a consensus on new student disciplinary policies and programs. He was particularly concerned with facilitating dialogue between the federation of teachers and the congress of inner-city ministers and between parent groups and the school board. The aim of these dialogues was to reveal differences in approach to student discipline, assess strengths and weaknesses of each approach, canvass alternatives, and then work together to build consensus on new disciplinary policies and programs which would have the support of all groups. This effort was successful. Agreement was reached first on the need for a new alternative school for chronically disruptive elementary and middle school students which would be free to develop discipline policies and programs appropriate for the students and families it served (Brown, 2004). Agreement was then reached

on a new district-wide code of behavior which provided a general framework within which individual schools could develop policies and programs appropriate for their school communities. In addition, schools with high suspension and expulsion rates received support from the office of student discipline to establish alternative learning centers based on the alternative school model. Within two years of implementing these steps, suspensions and expulsions had been reduced, especially among African American students, and the school district was found to be in compliance with the school desegregation agreement (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Erkins, 2002).

The purpose of this case study is to show how an urban school district was able to overcome barriers to communication across ethnic and socioeconomic lines and build community on the issue of student behavior and academic achievement. The story is told from the perspective of a key participant and relies on his observation notes and journals, informal interviews with other key participants, minutes from meetings, school and school district records, contemporary newspaper reports, and a University of Cincinnati doctoral dissertation. The case study uses analytical tools developed by critical race theorists and recent findings by historians of separate Black education to improve our current understanding of African American school leadership. Finally, the study hopes to encourage students of urban education to further investigate the roles school and district leaders – regardless of their ethnic, socioeconomic, or cultural background – can play in facilitating communication and building community in urban schools.

Review of Relevant Literature

Student Involvement in Education

Disadvantaged African American students are less involved than middle-class White students in the full range of educational opportunities offered by public schools. Not only do they spend less time at school, being suspended, expelled, and dropping out at higher rates than middle-class White students (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), they are also disproportionately under-represented in high ability classroom groups and in school gifted and advanced placement programs (Morris, 2002; Saddler, 2005). Furthermore, as critical race theorists point out, disadvantaged Black students are disproportionately over-represented in poorly funded urban schools which offer a narrower range of curricular and extra-curricular options and are able to attract and retain fewer teachers qualified in the subject areas they teach (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Different levels of student involvement are also indicated by gaps in academic achievement in most subject areas

and in rates of punishment in all categories of disruptive behavior. The most recent evidence on student achievement suggests that over the past 30 years African American students have closed the gap with White students but still have not achieved parity, while the gaps between poor and middle-class students remain as large as they were 30 years ago (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Similarly, evidence accumulated over the past 25 years shows that minority – especially Black and Latino students – and low socioeconomic status (SES) students continue to be punished more often and more severely than other students (Skiba et al.).

Severely disadvantaged students clearly face the most intractable barriers to school involvement. Anyon (1997) describes students at "Marcy" Elementary whose "desperate lives" make them "restless and confrontational" (p. 23) and teachers who no longer seem able to separate discipline from abuse. We are told that Marcy serves some of the most distressed families in one of New Jersey's most distressed cities, and it is not clear to the researcher whether anything short of rebuilding the community as a whole could be of much help to them. But even less disadvantaged students resist efforts by teachers to involve them in classroom activities and try to disrupt the work of those students who do want to participate. The issue here is complex, involving both ethnicity and SES, and these factors can work together or independently. Generally, however, many disadvantaged Black students perceive urban schools to represent the interests of a larger, White middle-class group which seeks to destroy the local group with which they identify. Fine (1995) makes this point explicit with reference to class when she says that "public schools in low-income neighborhoods often represent themselves as the means for low-income students to 'escape' their local communities – sometimes a way to save 'those students' from 'those parents'" (p. 86). Fordham (1996) makes the point with reference to ethnicity when she describes Black students' resistance to anything they perceive to threaten their group, including the apparent desire of some Black students to leave it. Even when disadvantaged Black students are involved in their schools they are often involved in different ways than middle-class White students. Fordham describes a kind of grudging acceptance of those students (especially girls) who work hard and who believe they are acquiring knowledge and skills that will benefit their families in the future, and she notes that an exception is clearly made for many athletes (especially boys) who make all students proud to attend the school. When there is no perceived benefit, however, resistance is the norm.

In schools where students and teachers see themselves as members of the same community working together toward a common goal, student discipline and academic achievement improve. It is no surprise that some of the most successful schools today are located in predominantly White middle-class suburbs

and staffed by predominantly White middle-class teachers. It is also true that some of the nation's most successful schools in the past were located in poor African American neighborhoods and staffed by poorly paid Black teachers (Siddle Walker, 1996). Separate Black education continues today in independent Black schools and African-centered schools in public school districts, but for every school that manages to overcome the remaining barrier between middle-class teachers and disadvantaged students (Morris, 2004), there seems to be another school where socioeconomic barriers alone prove to be insurmountable (Rist, 1973/2002). The vast majority of disadvantaged Black students, however, attend schools largely staffed by middle-class White teachers (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Pollard, 1997). The challenge faced by principals in these schools is to increase student involvement by building a school community which students and teachers possess in common. Principals have always played a role in facilitating communication and mediating disputes between teachers and students. As we have seen, however, when they are required to build bridges across ethnic and socioeconomic lines, the task can be particularly daunting.

Parent Involvement in Education

The gaps between ethnic and socioeconomic groups in levels of parent involvement in education are both similar to and different from the gaps in student involvement. The most recent evidence shows that fewer parents with high school education or less and fewer parents living below the poverty line attend school meetings, events, and student conferences and are less likely to act as volunteers, serve on school committees, and participate in school fundraising than parents with a college education and parents living above the poverty level (Vaden-Kiernan, McManus, & Chapman, 2005). Black, non-Hispanic parents, on the other hand, though they also attend school events, act as volunteers, and participate in fundraising at lower levels than non-Hispanic White parents, attend school meetings at the same levels and student conferences at slightly higher levels than White, non-Hispanic parents (Vaden-Kiernan et al.). This pattern of parent involvement has been roughly constant over the past 30 years. Moles (1993) reviewed large-scale surveys conducted in the 1970s and 1980s showing that levels of parental involvement depended on education and SES but not on minority status. Though parents with less than high school education had less than half the levels of school contact when compared with parents who had college degrees, and parents with very low incomes ($7,500 or less) were three times as likely to have low levels of contact with schools when compared with high-income parents (over $50,000), "no differences were observed between white, black, and Hispanic parents in level of involvement, suggesting that factors associated with poverty and limited education exert

more influence in school contacts than minority status" (Moles, p. 27). Hess and Leal (2001) offer a possible explanation for this phenomenon. Using data from the 1990 U.S. census organized by school district and a Council of Urban Boards of Education survey, they compared school district median income and percentage of African American student enrollment with opportunities districts provided for parents to have input regarding issues such as budgeting, collective bargaining, curriculum review, policy formation, principal selection, school closing, and superintendent selection. As expected, opportunities for involvement were greater in districts with higher median incomes. Interestingly, however, opportunities for involvement were also greater in districts with higher percentages of African American student enrollment: "the positive effect of the positive African American student enrollment variable suggests that decades of activism may have helped institutionalize a relatively high level of access" (Hess & Leal, pp. 483-484).

In seeking explanations for the gaps between ethnic and socioeconomic groups in levels of parent involvement in education, researchers take one of two general approaches. First, some researchers point to the fact that many disadvantaged parents want to be more involved in their children's schooling but are prevented from doing so. As well as restricted opportunities for interaction with teachers due to work, childcare responsibilities, transportation, and so on, there are psychological and cultural barriers disadvantaged parents face when communicating with teachers and school officials (Moles, 1993). These barriers include differences in educational level and SES, and also: dialect or language differences; fear and distrust of schools based on their own experience; feeling threatened by the authority of teachers (who have responsibility for a whole class); anxiety and defensiveness resulting from being contacted by schools only when their children get into trouble; and what disadvantaged parents perceive to be teachers' and school officials' racism, paternalism, and lower expectations for their children (Moles). But it is also true that many disadvantaged parents resist teachers' and school officials' efforts to get them involved, believing such involvement to be inappropriate. Crozier (2000) and Cullingford and Morrison (1999) have shown that in England different levels and kinds of parent involvement in education reflect different roles schools play in the lives of many working-class and middle-class families. Lareau (1987, 2000) came to a similar conclusion based on case studies of two elementary schools in the United States. She found that working-class parents at "Colton" attended parent-teacher conferences and school open houses and volunteered less often than professional middle-class parents at "Prescott." But the significance of these studies lies in the detailed portraits they allow Lareau to draw of the decidedly different roles school plays in the lives of families of different

socioeconomic status. For Colton parents, school is like work: it is something to leave behind at the end of the day. "Life," in contrast, involves evening and weekend socializing, mainly with relatives who live in the same neighborhood. School is also something to leave behind after graduation: "An insistence on high school graduation and a tentative interest in having their children attend college was typical of Colton mothers' and fathers' educational aspirations for their children" (Lareau, 2000, p. 100). For Prescott parents, on the other hand, school is an important part of family life. Not only are they more involved at school during the day, they monitor and reinforce their children's school work and read more often with them at home, and they socialize more with other Prescott parents. Furthermore, "Prescott parents insisted that their children acquire college degrees, and many were tentatively in favor of post-graduate work" (2000, p. 102). Given the different roles education plays in the lives of Prescott and Colton families, it is only to be expected that interactions between Prescott parents and teachers were "more frequent, more centered around academic matters, and much less formal" (1987, p. 78) than interactions between Colton parents and teachers.

African American parents may not be significantly less involved in their children's schools than White parents (Moles, 1993; Vaden-Kiernan et al., 2005), but recent studies indicate they are often involved in different ways. According to these studies many middle-class Black parents are active in: maneuvering and customizing their children's educational experiences in predominantly White schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999); choosing and supporting magnet schools for their children (Diamond & Gomez, 2004); and in organizing their communities to take control of separate Black schools (Byndloss, 2001). At the same time, however, many disadvantaged Black parents are non-choosers whose children go to neighborhood schools (Diamond & Gomez) and who are not just less involved in their children's education but feel a "wholesale suspicion, distrust, and hostility" for the teachers (Lareau & Horvat, p. 44). What is significant about these findings in the present context is that in none of the schools studied – whether predominantly White or Black, neighborhood or magnet – did Black families and White families possess the school in common. The research is dominated by critical race theory's notion of interest convergence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Lopez, 2003). Decades of activism are perceived to have resulted in middle-class Black parents using school and school district resources to improve educational outcomes for Black children, and White middle-class teachers, principals, and school district officials welcoming this opportunity to improve overall student achievement while allowing access to power without truly sharing it. If urban principals have a role to play in facilitating communication between teachers and students across ethnic and socioeconomic lines,

they must also act to facilitate communication between parents and teachers and school officials who seem prone to interpret the behavior of the "other" as promoting self-interest only.

African American Educational Leadership

Understanding the limitations of current research on the roles African American educational leaders play in increasingly diverse urban school districts requires some historical contextualization. In this section it is argued that researchers have failed to emphasize one of the most important roles Black principals have played in desegregated schools, because the literature has not recognized the vital importance of that role during Reconstruction and throughout segregation. We have long known what separate Black schools lacked when compared with White schools, but recent research is helping us understand what they possessed. We knew, for example, that throughout slavery most masters prevented slaves from acquiring literacy (Nolen, 2001) and that toward the end of slavery Southern states passed a series of laws making it a crime to educate slaves (Spring, 2001). We are now learning that a significant number of slaves were autodidacts, that some slaves established clandestine schools (Nolen), and that by the time of Emancipation between 7-10% of Blacks were literate (Fairclough, 2001; Spring).

Similarly, we learned in school that after the Civil War the Freedmen's Bureau, in cooperation with Northern philanthropic societies, was active in establishing schools for Blacks in the South. We now know that many of the celebrated "New England missionaries" were educated Northern Blacks (Butchart, 1990), that as early as 1867 over half of the teachers in freedmen schools were Black (Nolen, 2001), and that it was the former slaves themselves who took the initiative in establishing these schools (Spring, 2001). This was a community-wide crusade for education that was so successful that by the early 1870s a higher percentage of Southern Black children were enrolled in school than Southern White children (Spring). Historians are beginning to realize, as Butchart says, "that the freedmen were central actors in securing their own schooling, not merely passive recipients of northern benevolence" (p. 82). Again, we have known that after the collapse of Reconstruction and throughout segregation Black schools lacked financial and material resources. According to Spring, Black schools were consistently funded at one quarter the level of White schools and Black teachers and principals were paid about one quarter the salary of their White counterparts. We are now learning that throughout this period Black communities fought to gain control of their schools and used this freedom to hire principals who they charged with the task of developing quality academic programs and hiring exemplary teachers (Fairclough, 2001), and that with the

collapse of Reconstruction blocking opportunities in other professions, principals were able to attract large numbers of educated Blacks to serve as teachers (Nolen). By 1910, over half of all Black college graduates were teachers, and a 1940 U.S. Census survey of Black professionals counted 1,000 lawyers, 3,500 medical doctors, 17,000 ministers, and 63,000 teachers (Fairclough). The success of these efforts leads Spring to conclude that, "Despite school segregation and harassment from the white population, the African American population of the United States made one of the greatest educational advances in the history of education after emancipation" (p. 219).

The roles played by Black principals in segregated schools and communities were crucial. Within the school, "Operating with almost complete autonomy and armed with his educational commitment and training, the principal was able to implement a school program in keeping with his philosophy…. (T)he principal held the authority to hire teachers in line with his vision and fire those who did not conform" (Siddle Walker, 2000, p. 275). Within the community, the roles of principals included: motivating parents to provide resources for schools; being active in church; and because they were usually the most educated person in the community, many having masters degrees (Siddle Walker, 2000), acting as financial advisors and marital counselors and providing leadership for local initiatives such as credit unions (Siddle Walker, 2000). Black principals were called "professor" or "'fessor," Blacks using the term with respect, even reverence, Whites to avoid saying "Mr." (Siddle Walker, 2003, p. 60). But Black principals had one more important role to play in the period leading up to desegregation. Principals were often the only Black leaders to have regular contact with the White power structure (Siddle Walker, 2000), working with school district and state education officials and representatives from Northern philanthropic societies. Given the inherent inequality in these relationships, principals had to rely on supplication and persuasion, often in the face of petty racism (Fairclough, 2001). District superintendents and school board members used them as "chauffeurs, gardeners, and repair men, and sometimes treated their wives as washerwomen" (Fairclough, p. 15). Principals could only envy the relative independence of ministers and other professionals, who beginning in the 1930s, initiated a new form of engagement with the White power structure which featured negotiation and the application of pressure (Fairclough). Though many Blacks at the time came to question the leadership role of principals (Fairclough; Franklin, 1990), historians are more positive. They point out that ministers and lawyers were mostly products of successful Black schools; that state education officials and Northern philanthropic representatives, however paternalistic, were "by and large, sincere advocates of black education" (Fairclough, p. 58); and that Black schools were

protected and nurtured by generations of principals who, by insisting on the "sanctity of knowledge" and the "innate humanity of black children," were performing "political work of the most far-reaching kind" (Fairclough, p. 67).

The immediate effects of desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s included the closing of Black schools, the firing of thousands of Black teachers, and the demotion of almost all Black principals (Siddle Walker, 2003). Principals were only reappointed to positions of leadership in large numbers in the late 1970s and 1980s, mostly in predominantly Black schools (Franklin, 1990). Research on contemporary Black principals effectively begins with Lomotey's (1987, 1989, 1990) case studies of 3 successful African American principals in predominantly Black elementary schools in California in the early 1980s. For Lomotey, "Each principal appears to demonstrate a commitment to the education of African-American children, a compassion for, and understanding of, their students and of the communities in which they work, and a confidence in the ability of African-American children to learn" (1989, p. 132). More recent research has developed these themes: Reitzug and Patterson (1998) found in one principal "a form of caring that empowered students by assisting them in identifying alternative ways of proceeding as they addressed the situations that confronted them" (p. 165; see also Case, 1997); Morris (1999, 2004) and Pollard (1997) studied principals who lead by setting high standards for themselves and expecting teachers and students to follow; McGee Banks (2001) reports that African American principals generally involve parents and community members more in the activities of their schools than White principals (see also Lomotey, 1987); and Sanders and Harvey (2002) examine the leadership role of principals in developing collaborative partnerships with community organizations. But the history of the Black principalship indicates that this story is incomplete. Principals during segregation were recruited by Black communities to develop strong academic programs and hire qualified teachers, only to find themselves devoting much of their time to representing the interests of their school and community in contacts with White officials. Similarly, principals who were reappointed by urban districts in the 1980s to turn around predominantly Black schools found that to accomplish that goal they had to rebuild school communities by improving communication between disadvantaged Black parents and predominantly White middle-class teachers, school district officials, and school board members.

Building Community in Cincinnati

The present qualitative study employed multiple methods of data collection, relying primarily on document analysis and informal interviews with

key participants (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). Documents analyzed included: the lead author's observation notes and journals; minutes of committee meetings; school, district, and school board records (Brown, 1992); a doctoral dissertation (Erkins, 2002); an external evaluation report; and contemporary newspaper articles. Data were analyzed to determine patterns of action that advanced the design, development, and implementation of an alternative school for at-risk elementary and middle school students and a district-wide code of student behavior. The study, which is guided by Dewey's (1916/1944) notion of community, focuses on actions that facilitated communication and mediated disagreements between different groups. Preliminary analysis of the data identified four groups (a parent association, board of education, teachers' union, and an influential group of inner-city ministers) and four events (a meeting between teachers and ministers, two board of education meetings, and an incident in the downtown business area) that were crucial in advancing development of the school and the code of behavior.

In reflecting on the results of this preliminary analysis, the lead author became increasingly aware that the patterns of action he identified as being most significant were not addressed in the relevant research literature on African American educational leadership. It was true that part of his involvement in the development process was to understand and communicate with the predominantly disadvantaged Black families he served (Franklin, 1990; Lomotey, 1989) and to represent their interests and concerns to predominantly middle-class White school district officials (Fairclough, 2001). But critical race theory helped give voice to a second, more important aspect of his experience. In all four events that were crucial in advancing the development process, his primary role had been to facilitate communication and mediate disagreements between groups. The lead author's experience was conditioned by two relevant facts. First, he was a product of a disadvantaged African American family, a native of Cincinnati who was raised by his grandmother and was the first member of his family to graduate from high school. Second, as a youth and young adult he had considerable contact with the city's White community, having been a Black student at a predominantly White high school in the 1950s and at a predominantly White university in the 1960s, and a teacher and principal in the 1970s and 1980s in city schools which served many White families (Brown & Beckett, in press). The lead author saw himself both as a member of the city's African American community, working to improve educational opportunities for Black students, and as a member of the larger community, using his ability to facilitate communication across socioeconomic and ethnic lines to improve educational opportunities for all students.

An Alternative School for At-Risk Elementary Students

Project Succeed Academy (PSA) has been described in detail elsewhere (Brown, 2004; Brown & Beckett, in press). A brief overview of the school relevant to the topic of principal leadership will be given here. PSA began in 1994 as a summer reading program for 200 chronically disruptive K-8 students who were at risk of academic failure and dropping out of school, and was expanded to include 300 students in 1995. In 1996, the program was developed into a year-round school housed in a separate building with its own principal and teaching staff. The general aim of PSA was to break the causal connections between academic failure, disengagement, restlessness, and disruptive behavior (Arnold et al., 1999; Fleming, Barner, Hudson, & Rosignon-Carmouche, 2000; Lane et al., 2002) with intensive individual and small-group instruction intended to improve students' academic and social skills. The school, which enrolled 300 students in 1996-97 and 400 students in 1997-98, achieved its aims: daily student attendance was unusually high when compared with other alternative schools for at-risk students (96% in 1996-97; 93% in 1997-98); parent involvement was also high (89% in 1996-97; 93% in 1997-98); and, most importantly, the promotion rate of PSA "graduates" when they returned to their regular schools averaged 89% during the first two years of full implementation. Furthermore, PSA was developed in conjunction with a new district-wide code of behavior, and together they helped reduce district non-mandatory suspensions by an average of 17% and district expulsions by an average of 11.5% in each of the first two years of full implementation. After suffering several rounds of budget cuts, Project Succeed Academy, as of 2006, includes two programs housed in regular schools and led by an executive director.

Project Succeed's goals were, at first, limited to assessing at-risk students' academic skills and, recognizing the connection between poor academic skills and behavior problems, implementing programs that would improve both skills and behavior. The concern was not just that academic difficulties caused "disengagement, increased frustration and lower self-esteem, which then causes a child to act out" (Arnold et al., 1999, p. 591), but also that behavior problems arising elsewhere resulted in "noncompliance, elevated activity levels, and poor attention, which limit children's academic development" (Arnold et al., p. 591). The issue for Project Succeed was whether a summer reading program, however successful, was a sufficient response to the problems faced by at-risk elementary and middle school students in the district (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Kim, 2004). It quickly became apparent to the lead author that only a more "holistic" approach could address the needs of PSA students (Comer, 1997), and that his main role in developing this approach would be to facilitate meaningful communication and mediate disputes between PSA teachers and

parents. Some students enrolled in the summer programs, like the students at "Marcy" Elementary, were restless and confrontational, bringing with them to school problems that overwhelmed them at home (Anyon, 1997). Encouraged by the lead author to reach out to the students' families, Project Succeed teachers found that their first task was to work with support staff to connect parents with social service agencies and to advocate on their behalf (Fine, 1993). Most PSA students were clearly capable of succeeding in school but had developed a resistance to school work and a desire to disrupt the work of others (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1974). The lead author was aware that parents wanted their children to take advantage of the opportunities the school provided, but the students believed (in an embryonic way) that the same society that disadvantaged their parents was trying to disadvantage them and force them to "act White" (Ogbu, 2003). As parents became more involved in the day-to-day activities of Project Succeed, the lead author helped them understand that the message their children were bringing from home was not the message the parents intended, and, working with teachers, he helped them see that beneath a surface of student failure, disengagement, and disruption lay a deeper desire to help themselves and their families succeed. The most significant lesson the students learned came from seeing their teachers and parents work together in a spirit of cooperation and with a common purpose. Morris (2004) tells the story of a kindergartner who felt protective towards her mother because she had a "disability problem." When teachers found "something for her mother to do" in the classroom and she showed she could do it well, her daughter felt pride in her mother's accomplishment. Similarly, when PSA parents became involved in the activities of the school, students began to see their parents – and themselves – less "at-risk" and more "at-promise" (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

Project Succeed, unlike other alternative schools for at-risk students, was not a warehouse for disruptive students who had been banished from regular schools and which included minimal parent involvement (Dunbar, 1999), nor was it a school in which parent involvement was limited to attending meetings, conferences, and family therapy sessions (Aeby, Manning, Thyer, & Carpenter-Aeby, 1999). The lead author knew that the families he served wanted to be more involved in the school but were reluctant to take the initiative (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005). He actively encouraged them to participate in all aspects of the school's activities and to form a parents' association to organize their work and make it more effective. The contributions of the PSA Parents' Association were numerous (Brown, 2004), but in the school's transition from summer reading program to full-year alternative school its role was crucial. The success of a full-year PSA would depend, in part, on a low student-teacher ratio and small

class sizes (Carpenter-Aeby & Aeby, 2001; Dunbar, 2001). Small class sizes, in turn, depended on obtaining a school board commitment for additional funding at a time of financial restraint and budget cutbacks. The lead author encouraged the Parents' Association to become active in gaining the necessary financial support, and he lobbied the Cincinnati Board of Education to hold a public forum on the proposal. So many parents volunteered to speak in support of Project Succeed that the venue for the forum had to be changed three times. In the end, over 400 parents and 100 community members turned out to argue from personal experience that a year-round school based on the Project Succeed model was needed. Equally important, the majority-White school board showed its commitment to minority education by instructing staff to accommodate the parents and community members, listening to as many testimonials as time permitted, and by approving the proposal and providing most of the funding needed to support it.

A District-Wide Code of Behavior

Cincinnati's District-Wide Code of Behavior has been described in detail elsewhere (Brown & Beckett, 2006). The code addressed a need for consistent discipline policies across the district by listing student behaviors leading to suspension and behaviors leading to mandatory suspension with recommendation for expulsion. The code also addressed a need for flexibility within the district by listing options from which local school discipline committees could choose in developing pre-suspension programs designed to encourage students to learn self-discipline. The District-Wide Code of Behavior is still in existence as of January 2006. It has been modified over the years to reflect changes in the structure of K-8 schools in the district, to respond better to an increase in gang violence since the plan's inception, and to respond to changes in state and federal laws. Reflecting on his work in the area of student discipline, the lead author came to see that his role as facilitator and mediator, however important in his work at Project Succeed, was crucial to the success of the new discipline policies. Unlike principals during segregation who spoke for their communities (Fairclough, 2001; Siddle Walker, 2003), the lead author's role would be one of creating contexts, like the school board forum described above, in which parents and community members would speak for themselves. As director of the CPS Office of Student Discipline, he formed an advisory board and several teams which required consensual decision making, compelling participants to explore territory beyond their obvious differences.

Cincinnati Public Schools' Office of Student Discipline was created by the board of education in 1991 to address the problem of soaring suspension rates.

The first step the lead author took on assuming the directorship was to form a Discipline Advisory Board (DAB). The DAB was a broad-based coalition of concerned individuals that included representatives from the business community, universities, health care professions, mental health agencies, community activist groups, the school administrators' association, and parent groups. Most importantly, the DAB included representatives from the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, which had adopted a policy of zero tolerance for disruptive behavior which threatened to further increase already high levels of student suspension and expulsion, and the local chapter of the Baptist Ministers' Conference, a group of inner-city ministers which had campaigned successfully against a school tax levy in protest against the disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion of African American students (Bradley, 1994). The mandate of the DAB was to examine a range of approaches to discipline and to advise the board of education on their appropriateness. The DAB surveyed staff, teachers, and parents within the district to determine prevailing opinions on student discipline, in general, and on the need for a new district-wide code of behavior, in particular. The DAB also reviewed the research literature on best practices in the area of student discipline and examined other school districts' policies and programs, especially those that dealt with chronically disruptive students. The DAB found that different groups had significantly different views that could only be resolved if the district adopted a collaborative approach to the problem of student discipline. The board recommended a developmental process that included focus group research and guided mediation.

As a result of the DAB's initial findings, the lead author formed several teams to address the conflicts among groups, including a team to develop the concept of an alternative school for at-risk students. He recruited representatives from different stakeholder groups – principals, teachers, parents, business persons, union officials, ministers, doctors and health care workers, attorneys, government officials, and university faculty – and ensured that each team included a broad a range of interest and opinion. The team formed to develop the alternative school concept was particularly diverse, including a high school dropout and a doctor of philosophy, a welfare recipient and a millionaire, a manual laborer and a medical doctor, a corporate executive and a head of a government agency, a church conference chair and a community activist, as well as school administrators, teachers, and parents. The lead author made it clear in facilitating these teams that on the issue of student discipline, the voices of all participants counted. He said that disagreement was welcome, as long as team members agreed to work through their differences toward a consensus on recommendations to improve discipline. Remarkably, team members quickly developed a sense of shared authority and shared responsibility (Miretzky,

2004). Tension and conflict, apparent in the teams' first meetings, were replaced by a sense of common purpose and a spirit of cohesiveness. It was at this point in the process that the lead author requested a meeting with the executive councils of the Baptist Ministers' Conference and the Federation of Teachers, with the intention of mediating the differences between the two groups. As a result of the meeting, the ministers and teachers agreed to work more in harmony with each another (Clark, 1993). The value of this cooperation became clear in the final stages of the process, when the two groups formed an alliance and together advocated on behalf of Project Succeed and the code of behavior before the board of education (Clark, 1995).

The substantive differences between groups on the issue of student discipline were clarified in a debate over conflict resolution. A social service agency, with the support of some community groups, had convinced the board of education to pilot conflict resolution, a set of mediating principles that helped students negotiate conflict to zero. These were proven strategies in middle-class schools where parents taught the same principles to their children at home. For many inner-city children, however, the strategies were alienating, because at home children were taught: "when you're struck, strike back or I'll strike you" (Lareau, 1996). The result was that, in most Cincinnati schools, student suspensions due to fighting continued at the same high levels and the principles of conflict resolution were assessed as ineffective by district staff. For the lead author, the essence of the situation was that the district was paying a lot of money for a program that was not working. This money was needed to support programs like Project Succeed. At a regular school board meeting to decide if conflict resolution should be adopted on a permanent basis, the lead author presented data from an early assessment of Project Succeed summer programs to show its superior potential for improving student discipline in the district (Brown, 2004). The lead author also arranged for Project Succeed parents to speak at the meeting, and board members later told him informally that it was the parents' input which decided the issue. Parent testimonials in support of the school's health and wellness programs, which included Bushido martial arts instruction and the Star curriculum of violence prevention and conflict resolution through role playing and training in decision making (Brown, 2004), convinced the board to leave discipline program choices up to individual schools and to reallocate conflict resolution funds to the Office of Student Discipline (OSD). These decisions allowed the lead author to promote the success of Project Succeed programs to district schools and to support alternative learning centers for suspended students based on the Project Succeed model. At the same time, conflict resolution was adopted as a program the OSD would also support should a school disciplinary committee request it,

and the net result was that individual schools were in a better position to implement discipline programs they believed would be most effective with their particular student populations.

Still unresolved in the development process was the issue of external funding for discipline initiatives, especially the year-round Project Succeed Academy and the alternative learning centers in regular schools. An incident occurred in the spring of 1995 which gave the lead author an opportunity to facilitate communication more broadly between the city's disadvantaged African American community and its middle-class White community. On April 25, 1995, during school hours, a police officer was monitoring a disorderly group of high school-age youth who had gathered in Cincinnati's downtown shopping and business area. When asked by the officer to leave, the young people refused, and when one young man was told he was under arrest for disorderly conduct he resisted being handcuffed. The incident quickly escalated: The police officer applied a chemical irritant to subdue the young man; the young man's friends appeared ready to intervene; more police officers arrived on the scene; and violence broke out between the youth and the police. After a videotape of the incident was shown on the local evening news, Cincinnati's city manager requested an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident ("Beating by police," 1995).

Some of the young men involved in this incident were Cincinnati Public Schools' students. The next day and for several weeks after the incident, the lead author and Office of Student Discipline case managers swept the streets of the downtown area encouraging young people not to obstruct doorways to businesses and to be courteous to citizens. Their daily presence was noted and gratefully appreciated by members of the downtown business community, and this response was the start of a dialogue on the initiatives the OSD was taking and how the business community might become involved. Over the next year, downtown business people joined the OSD Discipline Advisory Board and the teams formed to develop the OSD's various initiatives. They also provided material and financial resources in support of the Project Succeed program, and guaranteed most of the external funding the school board needed before it would approve the year-round school and the alternative learning centers (Brown, 2004).

The lead author, in facilitating the involvement of the downtown business community, was bringing them into extended and purposeful contact with disadvantaged Black parents, some for the first time. They learned that below the hooliganism they had witnessed there was a serious claim by truant students to a masculine social space their schools denied them (Fordham, 2001). Black parents learned that behind the racism and classism they had perceived

in downtown business people there was a genuine concern that too little was being done to bridge the gaps between the city's two oldest communities. Like Northern philanthropists in the 19th Century, they were only waiting for the Black community to take the initiative and suggest ways they could help.

Conclusion

The lead author's primary role in the process of designing, developing, and implementing an alternative school for at-risk elementary and middle school students was similar to a role played by Black principals in separate Black schools during segregation (Fairclough, 2001; Siddle Walker, 2000, 2003). This is the same role that has been emphasized in research on Black principals in predominantly Black schools today (Lomotey, 1989; Morris, 1999). Creating a summer reading program which reached out to parents and guardians, assisting in establishing a parents' association to coordinate their activities, and encouraging the association to get involved in an initiative for a year-round school – all of this called for a commitment to Black education, an understanding of disruptive Black students, and an ability to communicate with Black parents. But the lead author also played a second role at the school, and this role was crucial in the development process for a new district-wide code of behavior. This second role, though also analogous to a role played by Black principals during segregation, is not one that is emphasized in research on Black educational leaders today. Involving parents at the school and teachers and staff in parents' homes; creating a disciplinary advisory board that included disadvantaged parents and wealthy business people and developing project teams which involved representatives from a teachers' union and a Baptist Ministers' Conference, each of which required consensual decision-making; and lobbying a school board to listen to parents and encouraging parents to give testimonials to the board – all of this involved facilitating meaningful communication and mediating disagreements between a city's Black and White communities.

In coming to this understanding of the role he played in the reform of an urban school district's student discipline policies and programs, the lead author was aware of the importance of critical race theory's notion of interest convergence. An alternative school for chronically disruptive students, for example, would clearly benefit the vast majority of teachers who work in regular schools. Equally, a summer reading program had showed parents and a ministers' group that an alternative school, though it involved "labeling and subsequent isolation of their children from mainstream educational opportunities" (Dunbar, 1999, p. 3), was also likely to fulfill the original promise of schools for this population and return students to regular schools better able to

succeed (Carpenter-Aeby & Aeby, 2001). The notion of interest convergence seemed necessary to explain what brought different groups together and the general outcomes of their work, but it did not seem sufficient to account for what actually occurred in the development process nor was it true to the lead author's experience or the experiences of key participants he interviewed. In the case of the meeting between the executive councils of the teachers' federation and the Baptist Ministers' Conference and the two groups' subsequent alliance, what was remarkable was how much *more* energy and creativity went into the development process *after* it became clear that self-interest would be satisfied. Again and again in the development process, the lead author saw individuals and groups move beyond self-interest. The experience suggested a late-20th Century equivalent to the 19th Century crusade for Black education, one in which self-interest is a given and what is remarkable is a common belief in the sanctity of knowledge and the innate humanity of all children.

The limitations of the present study are obvious. Any case study faces the problem of generalizability, and the present study might be seen to be unique both in terms of its historical context and its key participants. Given these limitations, the present study may seem to offer little guidance to future students of urban education or school community development. But for Dewey, the notions of community and communication are related to his notion of democracy. Just as industrialization, immigration, and urbanization characterized the Progressive Era in which Dewey came to maturity, challenging its urban school systems as well as its urban governments, in our own era, characterized by post-industrialization, immigration, and suburbanization, the basic challenges remain the same. For urban school districts, one of the most important challenges is to identify educators who can effectively lead increasingly diverse school communities. The problem is that leaders must add to their prior commitment to their own group a new responsibility to facilitate communication between groups. Although this may require new skills, especially linguistic skills, the present study would indicate that a more important requirement is the ability to live in a contemporary equivalent of the duality characteristic of African American experience, that is, to hold without debilitating conflict multiple identities and multiple responsibilities (Fordham, 1996). But if the present study is any guide, the solution to this problem is clear: Urban school districts need only identify as future leaders educators whose first commitment is to the importance of knowledge and to providing all children with the opportunity to learn.

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Lionel H. Brown is retired from the Cincinnati Public Schools where he served as principal of Bloom Junior High School and Withrow Senior High School and as district Deputy Superintendent. Currently, Dr. Brown is an assistant professor in the Division of Educational Studies, College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services at the University of Cincinnati. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lionel H. Brown, Division of Educational Studies and Leadership, College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services, University of Cincinnati, P. O. Box 210002, Cincinnati, OH, 45221-0002.

Kelvin S. Beckett is an adjunct lecturer in the Division of Educational Studies, College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services at the University of Cincinnati.

Family, Child, and Teacher Perceptions of African American Adult Assistance to Young Readers

Shadrack Gabriel Msengi

Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of African American adult family members, their children, and teachers regarding how family members viewed their roles in assisting their elementary-aged children to become better readers. The study compared each of the subgroups' perceptions respectively regarding: (a) the child's reading level; (b) family reading practice; and (c) the perceived barriers and opportunities in families' decisions to help the child become a better reader. Survey questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from each subgroup. Responses obtained from the surveys and interviews were compared to determine whether or not respondents had a shared understanding of what families believed and practiced. Findings indicated a mismatch among a majority of the respondents, suggesting a lack of shared understanding. However, in those instances where all three respondents agreed on a variable (e.g., reading to or with a child regularly), children were scored as reading above or at the class average. These shared perspectives provided frameworks for increasing mutually shared views regarding ways to assist a child to become a better reader. Differences in beliefs reflected processes unique to the African American adult family member, the child, and the teacher respectively, as well as pointing out conflicts in home and school relations. Several factors which could account for disagreement among the respondents were explored.

Key Words: African American adult family member, elementary students, elementary teachers, perception, literacy/reading practices, shared understanding

Introduction

During the last several years, the debate over how to find more appropriate ways to facilitate family-school literacy connections has continued to intensify. This debate has increased our awareness about the function and the overall importance of literacy, as well as the role the family plays in a child's literacy development. Even though the child's formal education takes place within the school, the family and other proximal variables can, and often do, influence the learning process (Ryan & Adams, 1995; Serpell, Baker, & Sonnenschein, 2005). According to Serpell et al., sharing common goals does not necessarily mean that families and teachers will hold the same beliefs or perceptions about how to accomplish these goals. A lack of shared beliefs has resulted in, and indeed requires, a continued effort to build mutual trust and understanding among these subgroups concerning family reading practices. Snow et al. (1991) discuss the disagreement regarding literacy practices and the family's role in a child's literacy development relative to the child's poor performance or failure in school. These authors view such disagreements as stemming from two serious, opposing views: one considers it a barrier if most or all of the family members lack school-like literacy, while the other considers the school as the main cause of such misunderstanding. Those who look to the home as the cause of poor literacy skills tend to focus primarily on low levels of parental literacy education, marital and/or financial instability, a paucity of reading materials, or a lack of parental aspiration. Those who look to the school as the main cause point to such factors as limited school resources, inadequate teacher preparation, low expectations for student achievement, and a deficiency in discourse patterns (i.e., communication exchanges between home and school).

The persistent debate over these views demonstrates a continuing lack of consensus on the best way to connect home reading practices with classroom instruction. In order to further explore the home and school literacy connection and its role in a child's reading development, the present exploratory study compared the perceptions of African American adult family members, their child, and the child's teacher regarding: (a) the child's reading level, (b) family reading practices, and (c) the perceived barriers to or opportunities for a family's decision to assist a child to become a better reader.

Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane's (2004) study of teachers' expectations found that teachers and other school personnel generally perceived African American students as deficient and those who did well as the exception to the rule, focusing on non-cognitive attributes such as being disrespectful, lacking discipline, and being anti-social. Conversely, instances where European American students performed poorly were generally perceived as an exception

to the norm. Perceptions such as these limit teachers' instructional practices. Similarly, on the part of the African American families, prior experiences of discrimination combined with lower income and educational level likely reduce a minority parent's expectations of their children's success. Other researchers (Farka, 1996; Farka, Robert, Sheeben, & Yuan, 1990) also found teacher perceptions regarding the academic aptitude of lower-income African American students was lower than teachers' perceptions of academic capacity for middle- and upper-income American students of European origin.

Literature (e.g., Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002) also suggests that literacy development depends greatly on the availability of resources, parental participation in reading activities, the extent to which parents model literacy (i.e., parent reading), a parent's efforts to directly engage his or her children in reading activities, and the extent to which reading is a shared activity in the home. However, many authors fail to discuss the nature of American society and its complex cultural issues, including family beliefs and teacher expectations, and discrepancies that might influence a child's reading development either positively or negatively. Failure to recognize these fundamental issues may result in misconceptions among individuals in home and school settings.

Importance of Family Reading Practices

Hansen's (1969) study of 48 fourth graders and their parents reported that a significant correlation exists between reading activities in the home and a child's independent reading at school. Similarly, Neuman's (1986) study of fifth graders and their parents revealed a positive correlation between student reading attitude and parental influence. Sonnenschein and Schmidt's (2000) review of studies on the home-school literacy connection expressed that the involvement of siblings and other family members is critical to the child's literacy development. More importantly, family members were essential in terms of: (a) modeling learning for the child; (b) introducing functional literacy to children; (c) providing a vital source of information to teachers concerning the range of activities and relevant experience the child engaged in at home; and (d) helping educators to recognize the myriad factors outside the home that can affect a child's literacy development. Similarly, Vygotsky (1979) stated that families create literacy situations naturally, such as during dinner table conversations and through interactive bedtime story rituals that allow children to experience literacy in an active way. Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2005) also noted that a child's reading often does not occur in isolation. Rather, it takes place within a rich context of the direct or indirect influence of the home and the school.

Even federal legislators have recognized the importance of family literacy, and legislation providing financial assistance to literacy initiatives has proven to

be the primary source of support for family literacy programs throughout the United States (Morrow, Tracy, & Maxwell, 1995). State and local initiatives for child reading/literacy have also increased public awareness about the role the family can play in a child's literacy development.

Home-school literacy partnerships have been developed through what Swap (1993) calls a Home-to-School Transmission Approach aimed at training families to be involved in a child's education in a manner prescribed by the school. However, Swap prefers a partnership model that allows families to share their expectations, plans, and decision-making with the schools prior to ultimate implementation of any plan in particular. Similarly, Barge and Loge's (2003) study of three middle schools investigated parental involvement and communication activities between parents and school. Their findings identified two types of discourse essential to a strong home-school relationship: (a) one based on partnership discourse that values family voices, and (b) the other based on information transmission discourse, which is similar to Swap's Home-to-School Transmission Approach. These researchers have anticipated potential conflicts that could arise in the event that the school and the home do not possess common goals for the child's education. Lightfoot (1978) concurred, acknowledging that a lack of consensus between families and teachers may lead to misunderstandings, even when teachers are making a concerted effort to invite families to participate in school activities.

The Ecology of Family-School Reading Practice Connections

Bronfenbrenner (1979) attested to the importance of the interplay among four spheres of the child's ecological environment and discusses how these can directly or indirectly facilitate or detract from a child's development. Although the present study focuses on African American homes and school settings, Bronfenbrenner viewed the child's immediate environment more extensively, taking into consideration not only the home, but also neighbors and peers. Beyond this, he considered other venues a little further removed, such as libraries, churches, and places of employment. He contended that these are as important as the school. The child's literacy growth involves an ongoing relationship between these various spheres, and supportive links must be established between all such environments. McNaughton (1995), who applied Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory to the development of literacy skills in school-age children, noted that the development of literacy takes place both within the home and school contexts. Certainly, the literacy activities in which children engage can be unique to each of these environments. Through carefully nurtured interactions, such activities can be mutually supportive.

The discontinuities between home and school environments may ultimately deny families and teachers opportunities for interaction (Goldenberg et al.,

2001; Sonnenschein & Schmidt, 2000). Teachers' have reported what they considered to be a lack of parental interest and support to be the most frequently occurring educational problem (Elam & Gallup, 1988). Elam and Gallup considered the information flow from the teacher to the families as perhaps the most vital communication, but one that presents only half the story pertaining to what happens in the school. A Chicago study of low-income African American sixth and eighth grade students found that while a majority of parents (61%) did not help with school activities, the majority of students (86%) reported that their parents did help them almost three times a week. Parents reported having unsuccessful or negative school experiences themselves and, consequently, they did not view the school as a source of hope for their children's future success and welfare (Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988).

Chavkin and Williams' (1993) cross-ethnic survey of elementary schools, surveying general views of African American and Hispanic American families regarding teachers, indicated that 95% of these families agreed to help their children with homework, and 97% agreed to cooperate with their children's teachers. Teachers and parents often tend to have reciprocally negative attitudes toward one another or have assumed that the other shares their views on a child's learning aptitude and performance. Stallworth and Williams (1982) reported similar findings showing that parents representative of a wide variety of economic backgrounds, including the disadvantaged, had positive self-perceptions and were willing to do more to work with the schools. However, the teachers surveyed in this same study tended to judge a majority of these parents as doing little to actually help their children. The study does not indicate whether or not the families that intended to help teachers were eventually true to their word, and if not, what impediments prevented them from doing so.

In another survey of elementary school teachers and parents, Epstein (1983) reported a low level of interaction between parents and teachers, with teachers making few overtures toward parents and rarely requesting their help in conducting learning-related activities in the home. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the parents had never participated in conferences with the teacher during the school year; roughly 60% of parents reported that they had never even talked with the teacher by telephone. However, teachers indicated that they had indeed communicated with parents concerning their children's reading program at school, despite contentions that such exchanges rarely occurred.

Greenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992) noted incongruence regarding approaches to reading practices at school as opposed to those practiced at home. Delpit (1986) posited that families may not be familiar or aware of the reading approaches practiced at their child's school, due primarily to changes since their own childhood years. According to McCarthey (1997), making a home-school

connection is not enough. It is vital for teachers to understand the complexity of a student's life, especially students whose backgrounds are dramatically different from the teachers' own. These previous research studies serve as a benchmark for investigating the differences and similarities in the perceptions of individual adult family members, children, and their teachers regarding a child's reading development.

Study Rationale

Previous research on the home-school literacy connection has primarily focused on emergent literacy (Anderson & Stoke, 1984; Leichter, 1984; Stewart, 1995; Sulzby & Teale, 1991), particularly among ethnic groups other than African American, variables other than reading, or single environment scenarios (i.e., either the home or the school, separately), or may not have considered the relationships between the three subgroups in terms of their composite perceptions. Such studies may have underestimated the importance of a shared understanding between the home (the adult family member, the child) and school (the teacher, the child). The present study, which focuses on African American families and third and fourth grade children, sought to extend the previous research on the home-school reading literacy connection by examining the different perceptions of the African American adult family member, the child, and the teacher with the purpose of understanding (a) the perceptions of the three subgroups regarding how each adult family member considers his or her role in a child's reading development and, subsequently, what the family did or did not do to assist the child in reading, and (b) each subgroups' perceptions of opportunities for or barriers to a family's decision to assist the child in his or her reading efforts. Focusing on children in grades three and four is particularly relevant because, at these age levels, essential reading instruction allows children to apply reading skills in conjunction with independent reading and home literacy practices.

Methods

Population Sample and Procedures

Participants for this study included 3rd and 4th grade children at an elementary school in a mid-sized city in Iowa, their adult family members, and their corresponding teachers. The total student population at the PreK-5 research site was 426, comprised of 2 Asians, 26 Hispanics, 1 Native American, 256 European American, and 141 African American children. The total minority enrollment was 39.9%, as indicated in school district data (Community

Schools Annual Report, 2003-2004). Among the 141 African Americans, the sampling frame consisted of 41 children from grades three and four, their family members (41), and associated teachers (7). Four of the seven teachers taught grade three, while the remaining three teachers taught grade four; six teachers were European American, and one was African American. The 41 children were unevenly distributed across the seven third and fourth grade classes. Among the 41 students, 18 were boys and 23 were girls. Of these students, 87% received free and reduced lunch. Consent letters were mailed to all participating families (41), their children (41), and teachers (7) respectively, asking them to take part in the study. Family members were defined according to criteria established by Edwards, Pleasant, and Franklin (1999) as all members of a household who reside under one roof and two or more people who reside together and who share similar goals and commitments. In this study, only the primary caregiver for each child was selected.

The demographic information for participants indicates a majority (88.4%) of adult family member respondents were female (*n*=24) and 11.4% (*n*=3) were male. Of family members, 48.2% (*n*=13) were between the age of 26 to 35; 37.0% (*n*=10) were between the age of 36 to 45. The remaining 14.8% (*n*=4) were aged 46 years and above. The majority of those identified as a child primary caregiver were 88.4% (*n*=24) mothers, with 2 responding (7.4%) fathers, 1 grandfather (3.7%), and one also self-identified as other (3.7%).

Adult family members' education level information indicated that 59.0% (*n*=16) of the family members had less than a junior college diploma, 33.3% (*n*= 9) had a junior college diploma, and 7.4% (*n*=2) had college or university degrees. Regarding job status, 74.1% (*n*=20) were employed outside of the home, and 25.9% (*n*=7) did not work outside the home. Of those who worked outside the home, 75% (*n*= 15) of the family members worked full-time, and 25% (*n*=12) worked part-time.

Instrument and Data Collection Procedures

Survey

A survey was administered as a means of collecting data, using questions modified from those employed in studies of parents, teachers, and students conducted by Stewart (1995), Dauber and Epstein (1993), and Shields, Gordon, and Dupree (1983). The survey questionnaire included categorical (Yes/No) semi-structures and multiple choice questions. Questionnaires were sent to all 89 study participants. The 41 questionnaires for adult family members were sent to the family's home, and the 41 children's and 7 teachers' questionnaires were delivered to the school. The initial survey from the 41 adult family members yielded 19 responses. A follow-up phone call was made to all family

participants to remind them to return the surveys. Family members who failed to return survey responses after the follow-up phone call were called again and asked if the researcher could visit them in their homes in order to complete the survey. This process increased the number of survey respondents from 19 to 27 adult family members. Family members who did not respond to either the telephone follow-ups or visitation by a researcher were categorically dropped from the study, along with those children whose family members did not return the surveys. All 27 children whose family members completed surveys and all 7 teachers were surveyed at the school. This resulted in a final sample size of 27 (66%) family members, 27 (66%) children, and 7 (100%) teachers. Children were unevenly distributed across the two grades. Pseudonyms are used in place of all the names of the adult family members, the children, and the teachers in order to ensure confidentiality. Four teachers (Mrs. Bernard, Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. Alexander, Mrs. Edward) taught grade three, and three teachers (Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Hartman, Mr. Lawrence) taught grade four.

Interviews

Roughly two months after the initial survey, a follow-up procedure was conducted, sampling and interviewing a small number of the participants (6 families, 6 children, 6 teachers) from the original surveyed population. This sampling technique was employed specifically for the purpose of gleaning additional information to add to survey findings (McMillan & Wergin, 2002).

Originally, 7 children and 1 adult family member associated with each child (i.e., 7 in all) were randomly selected. The child and his or her adult family member were then matched with the corresponding teacher. They were next contacted for face-to-face interviews in order to validate the information obtained from responses to the survey. However, one family eventually chose to discontinue its participation due to scheduling and work conflicts. This meant that one child and his or her teacher also had to be omitted from the final results. Therefore, 18 participants, 6 from each subgroup, were ultimately confirmed for interviews. Teacher and child interviews were conducted on school premises, while family members were consulted in their homes.

Data Analysis

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) reading score was utilized for a child's reading score record. Data were analyzed following two main categories of variables: (1) the perceived child's reading level, and (2) the family's reading practices. The family reading practice variables were categorized into five domains, whether or not the family: (a) provided reading materials, (b) shared reading concern, (c) had regular reading time for the child, (d) another family member read to child, and/or (e) attended Every Child Reads parent education sessions (see

Table 1). In addition, an independent analysis provided additional information from interview responses that mainly focused on the perceived barriers to and opportunities for a family's decision to assist the child to become a better reader and reading strategies families used as they read to or with the child.

The analysis employed used analytic strategies consisting of frequencies of responses (yes/no), percentages, and chi square using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 11.0. At times, an alternative analysis was performed to manually match across survey and interview responses from each adult family member, child, and corresponding teacher to ascertain whether or not there was evidence of a shared understanding between these individuals.

Table1. Perception Variables and Participants' Response Options

Variable Name	**Responses**
Perceived Child Reading Level (PCRL)	1=Classmates read better than child
	2=Child reads as well as classmates
	3=Child reads better than classmates.
ITBS Reading Scores	1 = 00-40
	2 = 41-70
	3 = 71-100
Family Reading Practice Variables	**Responses**
Provided Reading Materials (FPRM)	[ ] No [ ] Yes
Shared Reading Concern (FSRC)	[ ] No [ ] Yes
Had Regular Reading Time at Home (RRTH)	[ ] No [ ] Yes
Family or Other Family Members Read to Child (OFMRC)	[ ] No [ ] Yes
Family Attended Every Child Reads (FECR)	[ ] No [ ] Yes
Family Status Variable	**Responses**
Family Work Status (FWS)	1=Doesn't Work (DW)
	2=Work Part Time (WP-T)
	3=Work Full Time (WF-T)
Family Educational Level (EL)	1=High School or Below
	2=Junior College or Above
	3=University Level

Results

The results section presents the general descriptive analysis which provided general perceptions of each of the subgroups toward the adult family member's

reading practices. This is followed by an alternative analysis that manually matched or compared the survey and the interview responses obtained from the three subgroups. Each of the observed patterns was subsequently anchored to either the Perceived Child's Reading Level (PCRL) or the ITBS reading score. Information gathered from surveyed and interviewed participants are presented for each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1: How do perceptions compare among the family, child, and teacher regarding the child's reading level?

Perceived Child's Reading Level by Family, Child, and Teacher and ITBS Scores

General Descriptive Analysis

Table 2. Perceptions of Child's Reading Level (*n*=77)

Respondent	PCRL	n	%	ITBS Score %
Family	Middle**	17	63.0	25.9
Child	Middle**	20	74.1	25.9
Teacher	Low*	14	51.6	63.0
Family	Low*	9	33.3	63.0
Child	Low*	4	14.8	63.0
Teacher	Middle**	7	25.9	25.9
Family	High***	1	3.7	11.1
Child	High***	3	11.1	11.1
Teacher	High***	6	22.2	11.1

*Most classmates read better than the child
**Child reads as well as his/her classmates
***Child reads better than most classmates

As shown in Table 2, a majority of the adult family members (63%; *n*=17) and children (74.1%; *n*=20) reported the child as reading as well as her/his classmates, while the teachers reported that 51.9% (*n*=14) of the children were reading below the levels of their classmates. ITBS reading scores indicated only 25.9% (*n*=7) read at the class average. As it turns out, the teachers' perceptions were less disparate vis-à-vis the ITBS scores than were those of the children and the adult family members. Another 33.3% (*n*=9) of the adult family members and 14.8% (*n*=4) of the children reported that the child was reading below his or her classmates, while teachers reported that only 25.9% (*n*=7) of the children were reading at the class average. All three groups (family, child, and

teacher) perceived the majority of children as reading worse than their classmates. In this instance, 3.7% (*n*=1) of adult family members and 11.1% (*n*=3) of children perceived the child as reading better than his/her classmates, compared to teachers who reported 22.2% (*n*= 6) of children as reading better than their classmates. The analysis of frequency indicates that all respondents felt only a few children were reading above or at the level of their classmates. A discrepancy also was clearly noted in those instances in which children were perceived as reading below or at the class average. While a majority of children and their corresponding family members perceived the child as reading at the class average, teachers reported that a majority of the children (51.9%; *n*=14) were reading below the level of their classmates. The ITBS scores indicated 63.0% of the children were reading at a level below their classmates.

Perceived Child's Reading Level by Family, Child, and Teacher

Specific Descriptive Analysis

Although the discrepancies regarding the subgroups shared understanding was noted in the previous analysis of percentages and frequencies, an alternative descriptive analysis was performed to manually match the adult family member, the corresponding child, and the associated teacher to determine the indices of agreement or disagreement regarding the child's reading level. To achieve this process, perceived scores on the child's reading level were tracked back to determine which adult family member, their child, and the associated teacher matched in terms of their perceptions of the child in question.

Matching the adult family member's responses to those of the child and the teacher yielded some noticeable patterns. The patterns were divided into the following groups: those who expressed total agreement, partial agreement, or total disagreement. Total agreement referred to those instances in which the individuals in the subgroups were all in agreement as to the child's perceived reading level. In the partial agreement group, the adult family member and the child were in agreement, but the teacher was not, or the adult family member and the teacher were in agreement, but the child was not, or the child and the teacher were in agreement, but the adult family member was not. For the total disagreement group, the adult family member, the child, and the teacher were all in disagreement. (Note: A grid showing responses for each category by child is available by request from the author.)

In the first category, the adult family member, the child, and the corresponding teacher agreed on the child's reading level—this occurred only 4 times out of 27. Of the 4 potential areas of agreement on PCRL, 3 of the subgroups actually scored the child as reading at the level higher than his or her classmates, while 1 scored the child as reading lower.

The second category refers to the 12 instances in which the adult family member and the child were in agreement, but the teacher was not. In these 12 areas, 6 teachers scored the child lower, while 6 teachers scored the child at a higher reading level. Every time the teacher scored the child higher, the family scored the child as reading at the average. None of the children in this particular grouping self-scored himself/herself as reading better than everybody else.

In the third category, 4 adult family members and 4 teachers agreed regarding the child's reading level, but the child did not agree. Within these 4 instances, 3 family members and teachers scored the child lower while the 3 children self-scored themselves as reading above or at the class average. One child self-scored as reading below the class average. However, this particular child was scored by the family and the teacher as reading at the class average.

The fourth category included 4 times in which the child and the teacher agreed, but the family did not. Of these 4, 2 of the family members scored the child lower, and the other 2 scored the child higher. When the child and the teacher agreed, 3 of 4 teachers scored the child as reading at the class average.

The fifth category depicts the 3 instances where the adult family member, the child, and the teacher were in total disagreement. In this instance, two teachers scored the child as reading below the grade level; however, 2 out of the 3 children self-scored as reading above the class average, while one child self-scored as reading at the class average. One family member scored the child as reading below the class average, while the child self-scored as reading at the class average, and the teacher scored the child as reading above average.

These findings indicated the adult family members and their corresponding children agreed with one another at a greater frequency than either of them agreed with the teacher.

Research Question 2: How similar or different are the perceptions among the adult family member, the child, and the teacher regarding what families do to help the child read?

The null hypothesis states: There is no significant relationship among the subgroups' perceptions of what the family did to help the child read. Conversely, the hypothesis states: There is a significant relationship among the subgroups' perceptions of what the family did to help the child read.

The results on subgroups' perceptions of family reading practice variables indicated that over one-half (55.6%; n=15) of the adult family members and even more (68.6%; n=21) of the children reported that the family provided reading materials, while teachers reported that slightly under one-half (48.1%; n=13) of the adult family members provided reading materials. Fifty-one

percent (*n*=16) of the family members and 55.6% (*n*=15) of the children reported that the adult family members shared reading concerns with the child's teacher, while teachers reported that only 29.6% (*n*=8) of the adult family members shared reading concerns with them. As for Family Had Regular Reading Time at Home (FRRT), the results showed that 37.0% (*n*=10) of the family members and over two-thirds (77.8%; *n*=21) of the children reported that they had regular reading time at home. Next, 60% (*n*=21) of family members but only 45.7% (*n*=16) of children reported that another family member read to or with the child. Nearly 54% (*n*=19) of the adult family members and 62.9% (*n*=22) of the children reported that the adult family member did not attend reading conferences, while teachers reported that 68% (*n*=24) of the adult family members did not attend Every Child Reads parent education sessions (Table 3).

Table 3. Perceptions of Frequencies of Family Reading Practices (*n*=27)

Variable Response		*n*	Family (%)	*n*	Child (%)	*n*	Teacher (%)
FPRM	No	12	44.4	06	22.2	14	51.9
	Yes	15	55.4	21	68.6	13	48.1
FSRC	No	11	40.7	12	44.4	19	70.4
	Yes	16	59.3	15	55.6	08	29.6
FRRTH	No	17	63.0	06	22.2	-	-
	Yes	10	37.0	21	77.8	-	-
OFMRC	No	19	70.4	10	37.0	-	-
	Yes	08	29.6	17	63.0	-	-
FECR	No	16	59.3	18	66.7	16	59.3
	Yes	11	40.7	09	33.3	11	40.7

FPRM= Family Provided Reading Materials, FSRC= Family Shared Reading Concerns, FRRTH= Family Had Regular Reading Time for the Child at Home, OFMRC= Other Family Member Read with Child, FECR= Family Attended Every Child Reads Sessions

The results partially support the hypothesis stated above. The perceptions measured by Family Shared Reading Concerns (FSRC) were not significantly different between the family, the child, and the teachers. However, the child's perceptions measured by Family Provided Reading Materials (FPRM) and FRRT were significantly lower than the perceptions of the families and teachers ($p<.05$). The teachers' perceptions measured by FSRC were significantly lower than the perceptions of the families and the children ($p<.05$). Finally, the family perceptions measured by Other Family Member Read with Child (OFMRC) were significantly lower than the perceptions of the child (Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' Perceptions Between the Subgroups

Variables	Family		Child		Teacher	
	χ^2	*p*	χ^2	*p*	χ^2	*p*
FPRM	.333	.564	8.333	.044*	.037	.847
FSRC	.926	.336	.333	.564	4.481	.034
FRRT	1.815	.178	8.333	.004*	-	-
OFMRC	4.481	.034*	1.815	.178	-	-
FECR	.926	.336	3.00	.083	.926	.336

*An asterisk indicates that a significant difference was found among the subgroups.

Specific Descriptive Analysis

Whether Family Provided Reading Materials at Home (FPRM)

The second research question was asked with the purpose of determining each participant's perceptions as to whether or not the adult family members were providing the child with reading materials. Of the 27 respondents, there were 4 instances in which the adult family member, the child, and the teacher agreed that the family member provided reading materials. When all 3 parties agreed that the family provided reading materials, 3 of the 4 adult family members and 3 of 4 teachers scored the child as reading at or above the grade level, while all of the children self-scored as reading at or above the class average.

In the second category, 8 instances occurred in which the family and child agreed that the family provided reading materials, but the teacher did not. In this category the family and the child were in more agreement than the teacher on perceived reading levels, as well. In the third category, 2 instances occurred in which the teacher and the child agreed about provision of materials, but the family did not. In the fourth category, 5 instances occurred in which the child and the teacher agreed that the adult family member provided reading materials, but the family member did not.

Family Shared Reading Concerns (FSRC)

This question asked whether adult family members communicated with the child's teacher about reading problems, reading progress, or simply wanting to know more about what their child is doing in reading. Of the 27 adult family member-child-teacher groups, 5 instances occurred in which all agreed that the family shared reading concerns. Data indicated that when the family member, the child, and the teacher all agreed that the family shared reading concerns, the teacher scored the child as reading above or at the class average.

Secondly, there were 6 instances in which the family and the child agreed that the family shared reading concerns, but the teacher did not. In a single instance, the teacher disagreed with the premise that the family shared reading concerns and scored the child as reading above the class average. However, in most instances when the family and the child agreed but the teacher disagreed,

the teacher scored the child as reading below the class average. There was only one situation in which the family and the teacher agreed that reading concerns were shared but the child did not. Also, only one instance was noted in which the child and the teacher agreed, but the family member did not.

In summary, when the adult family member, the child, and the teacher agreed about the family sharing reading concerns, the teacher scored the child as reading above or at the class average. However, when the adult family member and the child agreed, but the teacher did not, the teachers tended to score the child as reading below the class average.

Family Reading Time (FRRT) and Other Family Members Read with Child (OFMRC) at Home

There were only 9 instances out of 27 in which the family and child agreed they had regular reading time at home. None of the children self-scored as reading below his or her classmates whenever the child and the family perceived they had regular reading time at home.

It was curious to note the responses to perceived child reading levels when the survey indicated other family members read to the child. Only 6 out of the 27 family members and their children agreed that other family members read to the child at home. In all of these instances, the child self-scored as reading at the class average within this particular category, while 4 of the 6 family members scored the child as reading below the class average. Yet every time the parent and child agreed that other family members read to the child, the teacher scored the child as reading above the average, while no family member scored the child as reading above the class average.

There were 3 instances in which the child and the adult family member agreed that there was regular reading time and other family members did read to child. Among these instances, the teacher scored the child as reading above the classmates. In 2 of these instances, the child and the family members both scored the child as reading at the class average. Yet one family member scored the child as reading below his or her classmates.

Family Attended Every Child Reads (FECR) Parent Education Session

There was only one instance in which all respondents agreed that the family attended an Every Child Reads parent education session. In this instance, all respondents scored the child as reading below the class average. Of the 27 groupings, there were 4 instances in which the adult family member and the child agreed about conferences, but the teacher did not. There were only 2 instances in which the family and the teacher reported attending parent education sessions but the child did not. Finally, there were 4 times in which the child and the teacher agreed about session attendance, but the family did not.

An Independent Analysis

An independent analysis presented additional information from interviews. The interview responses were based on what was discussed during the family-teacher conferences and whether or not the teacher shared reading strategies or showed families how to read to or with their children. Frequently occurring responses regarded how the child could best be assisted in reading. Teachers were asked whether or not they shared reading strategies with parents during those Every Child Reads parent education sessions, and whether family members were using them. Each of the six participating teachers commented on one family and the corresponding student. When the teachers were asked whether they had shared any reading strategies, none of them seemed to have done so.

Mrs. Baker: No strategy.
Mrs. Bernard: I try to encourage her to read at home, just read anything.
Mrs. Simpson: The family is not open to relationship yet.
Mrs. Alexander: No.
Mrs. Herman: No.
Mr. Leonard: Not at all.

To assess the adult family member's knowledge as to whether or not he/she used reading strategies when reading with the child, the six adult family members were asked to identify things done when reading with their children (e.g., what did they do when they arrived at a word the child did not understand). Each corresponding child was also asked to share some of the things that the adult family member did when reading to or with him/her.

Five out of six adult family members and all six children indicated that they used reading strategies at home. Responses from adult family members and their corresponding children revealed that they used strategies similar to those used during classroom instruction. When coded into categories, it appeared that families used reading strategies such as phonemic awareness (Adam, 1992; Bishop, Yopp, & Yopp, 2000), support reading strategy, contextual analysis, modeling strategy (Rasinski & Padak, 2004), and reciprocal questioning (Manzo, 1969). The following are families' responses regarding what they did when reading to or with their children.

Support Reading Strategy/Phonemic Awareness

Humphrey has been monitoring Rebecca's reading and providing her with assistance, support, and encouragement as she reads. At the same time, he uses a phonemic awareness strategy as he asks Rebecca to sound out the words.

Humphrey *(Family)*: I explain what the word means. I make sure she understands what the word means.

Rebecca *(Child)*: They try to make me figure it out…sound it out, do action.

Contextual Analysis/Prediction

Ana reported that she provided Renate with challenging books and encouraged her to read by herself. In the following example, Ana is using a contextual analysis strategy in which Renate is required to use the context (pictures) to predict what the story is about. This strategy helps the reader become curious and maintain an interest in what is happening in the story.

Ana *(Family)*: I try to get her some challenging books.

Renate *(Child)*: I try to look at the pictures. They correct what I say.

Contextual Analysis/Phonemic Awareness/Repeated Reading

Tehama uses a context strategy to enable Tatty to rely on the passages, sentence meaning, and his own experiences to puzzle out unknown words. Similarly, Tehama asks Tatty to repeat what is read. This strategy enables him to become more familiar with recurring phrases and other predictable language patterns. Thus, he is able to gain a better understanding of the story and to acquire more vocabulary.

Tehama *(Family)*: I tell him to slow down and repeat the word.

Tatty *(Child)*: Sometimes they grab a piece of paper, write out the word, and sometimes they rip it up and we put the pieces under the word. Then, I try to spell. Sometimes when it is hard…they don't sound it out. They tell me to go past it, and after, I go back and read it.

Modeling Strategy/Phonemic Awareness

Mokena is helping her child, Herma, by modeling when she reads aloud with her. This reading strategy is important, especially for less able readers.

Mokena *(Family)*: If she has problems, I will read them or use directions on the computer games. I will read those (directions). I read those all the time so that she can understand.

Herma *(Child)*: They help me sound it out.

Phonics/Phonemic Awareness

Nina uses a phonemic awareness reading strategy to help Queen develop an awareness of individual words in the text. She is also assisting Queen to decode and comprehend the materials they are reading.

Nina *(Family)*: I tell her to slow down and just pronounce letter by letter and pronounce the word.

Queen *(Child)*: No, they don't do anything. Sometimes they sound it out.

Reciprocal Questioning/Phonemic Awareness

By guiding the child to ask questions, Tanya is applying reciprocal questioning, a strategy that allows the child and the teacher (in this instance, the family member) to ask questions concerning information not directly contained in the text. Subsequently, by asking the child to use a computer or a dictionary, Tanya helps Cecilia find synonyms and use the context to determine the meaning of new words.

Tanya *(Family)*: I tell her to ask questions about it. If she doesn't know the meaning, she's got the computer…dictionary. If she cannot pronounce, I tell her to sound it out.

Cecilia *(Child)*: They ask me questions: How did you like the book? To remember, tell us something about the book. They help me if this is really a long word.

It appears that adult family members have some knowledge of and use appropriate reading strategies. However, teachers did not know whether or not families were using a variety of reading strategies when reading to or with their children at home. The following section addresses the perceived opportunities for or barriers to adult family members assisting a young reader.

Research Question 3: What are the perceived opportunities for, or barriers to, adult family members' decisions to assist a child in his or her reading effort?

Perceived Barriers or Opportunities

The results in the following section were primarily based on responses from the interviews designed to determine the respondents' (family, child, and teachers) thoughts pertaining to perceived opportunities for and barriers to the family's decision to assist a child in his or her reading efforts. Respondents were asked to reflect upon the opportunities, constraints, problems, and concerns related to the reading assistance the child received at home. Interview questions asked whether the families perceived any window of opportunity to share reading concerns with the teacher and helped identify each of their respective wishes concerning what they felt families, children, or teachers could do to assist the children to become better readers. The interview questions also sought to determine how each group regarded the quantity and quality of the communication activities that already existed between home and school.

Humphrey, a pastor in a local church, shared some of his concerns regarding his child, Rebecca. He acknowledged his desire for more positive communication with his child's teacher, Mrs. Baker. As he said, "I need to hear from the teacher that my child is doing well." He also wanted to see rewards and assurances that the teacher was helping his child select different books. He further stated, "I wish I had more time. I would encourage her to read more books." However, Rebecca's teacher reported that Humphrey never shared any of these concerns with her nor had he attended any Every Child Reads parent education sessions. The teacher perceived the child to be reading below the class average, while both the family and Rebecca agreed that she was reading at the class average. Mrs. Baker reported, "I suggested books to be read at home, and I called for a meeting, but the family never showed up at school. The family is very quiet and wants the child to succeed."

Ana, a single mother, was aware of what it meant to assist her child, Renate, in reading. However, she noted, "My daughter's negative view to her teacher prevents her progress." She also remarked, "…think I should be more involved, for me it is just time. Being a single mom, I don't see that my child gets enough help." All parties agreed the child was reading below the class average. The teacher's concern was that the family never attended Every Child Reads, while the family member thought she had attended whenever there had been a session. However, the parent mistakenly thought that the only time they could contact the teacher was during the conference or session time. Most family members expressed a desire for more contact with the teacher and wanted their children to read more challenging books.

Tehama, Tatty's grandmother, felt that she helped Tatty with his reading. However, she said, "I wish I had opportunities to meet with the teacher. I have a busy schedule." Her grandchild's teacher, Mrs. Simpson, also wished that the family could attend parent education sessions. While Tehama thought Tatty read at the class average, Tatty and his teacher scored Tatty as reading below the class average. In this instance, the teacher and the family had good intentions concerning the child's reading development, but their perceptions of the child's reading level differed.

Mokena, Herma's mother, indicated her willingness to work with her child's teacher. The teacher, Mrs. Alexander, wished that she had had the opportunity to meet with the adult family member. She said, "The family is not always open to a communication relationship yet." However, Mokena had a different view about the teacher and said, "I don't think the teacher talks about positive things about my child. I wish the teacher could talk about positive things." While the family and the child perceived the child as reading at the class average, the teacher scored the child as reading below the class average.

Nina, Queen's mother, also shared her wishes and concerns regarding opportunities for family literacy practices. "I wish they could do more for the child's reading. The teacher calls me when Queen is in trouble…I wish Mrs. Hartman could spend more time with Queen, instead of calling me every time…deal with the problem and then call me. Tell me Queen is reading at this level or she is moved to this level." Mrs. Hartman was concerned about the family as well. For instance, she said, "After the first Every Child Reads session, I tried to talk to them (family members), but they did not respond to me…a couple of times I was almost cut off…I called them four times but they didn't respond." Interestingly, the adult family member, the child, and the teacher all agreed on the child's reading level by scoring Queen as reading at the class average.

Tanya, Cecilia's mother, acknowledged that reading was most important. However, she expressed her concerns about Cecilia's reluctance to read; she also regretted not having the time to attend the Every Child Reads sessions at the school. Despite the mother's regret, Mrs. Edward, Cecilia's teacher, did not have any concerns, nor did she have any complaints about the child's reading. Although both Mrs. Edward and Tanya had a positive attitude toward each other, both admitted that they had never met at any of the parent education sessions. They all agreed by scoring the child as reading at the class average.

When children were asked to share what they perceived to be opportunities for or barriers to their family's decision to assist them in reading at home, 3 out of 6 made no additional comments. However, three children wished that adult family members could help them with reading every day and buy more books for them. The children promised to work hard to attain their reading goals.

Discussion

The consensus regarding a child's academic ability and ascertaining the overall influence of what occurs in the home environment to help the child read is still a key challenge facing educators. A variety of factors have been investigated as possible elements pertinent to meeting this challenge. This study sought to focus primarily on the African American adult family member, the child, and the teacher, with the aim of determining whether or not these respective parties had a shared understanding of the following: the child's reading level, the family's reading practice, and their relative views on opportunities for or barriers to families' decisions to assist a child in reading. The data showed patterns of agreement/disagreement. In some instances, there was pronounced disagreement between the teachers and both the family and the child, suggesting a lack of shared understanding. The causes of this disparity may be cultural issues, lack of communication, or differing expectations for a child's success,

as discussed by a number of previously cited studies, especially studies that focus on teacher and parent beliefs tied to race and social class biases impeding home-school relations (Diamond et al., 2004). The alternative analysis applied in the current study matched the individual family member, the child, and the teacher and revealed some interesting patterns that previous studies, which relied heavily on general statistical analysis of percentages and frequencies, have not explicitly acknowledged.

Views on a Child's Reading Level

The data indicated that while a majority of family members and their children thought that the child was reading at the class average, their teachers perceived most of the children as reading below their classmates. In addition, when the perceptions of each subgroup were compared to the children's ITBS reading scores, the teachers' perceptions most closely matched the reading level indicated by the child's standardized reading scores. Only a few family members, children, and teachers in the present study felt that many students were reading above the class average. This was similar to Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) and Pretzlik (2000) who found that teachers' expectations were closely related to the child's actual academic skills. The question remains, however, as to why there has been such a disparity between the teachers and the parent-child perceptions. Numerous reasons could be furnished as to why these varying perceptions regarding the child's reading process exist. The next several paragraphs discuss the delineation of some of the factors that could account for the variables related to the perceptions of the subgroups in this study. These can be as subtle as an unconscious bias on the teachers' part, or as overt as anxieties and stress stemming from social and economic conditions within the home. A myriad of factors can influence a teacher's or a family member's perception of a child's reading ability and a child's self-perceptions (including what the parent or the teacher thinks about that child). According to Goldenberg et al. (2001), when families and teachers are from different ethnicities, they are likely to have different expectations and beliefs regarding the child's academic performance, which may lead to a home and school disconnect.

In the current sample, several reasons for the variability of perceptions may have occurred. One possibility is that the child's reading progress may not have been consistently communicated to families. As a result, family members' responses were not supported by updated data from students' school records, or families may not have taken the time to inquire about the child's reading progress. Results from race comparison studies have typically shown European American teachers as having low expectation for African American students' academic performance (Graham, 1992). This present study does not rule out

these lines of thinking on the part of the teachers. Children's self-perception regarding their reading level clearly demonstrated a closer affinity to that of the associated adult family member, while typically being quite disparate from that of the teacher. This evidence echoed Guthrie and Greaney's (1991) argument that families are powerful socializers of children's self-perceptions. Most likely what was missing was uniformity of experience between families and teachers regarding the child's reading ability which led to differing perceptions.

An alternative analysis that matched the individual family member, the child, and the corresponding teacher provided patterns that warrant further interpretations. Pattern one occurred when the family, the child, and the teacher all agreed on the child's reading level. In this instance, the child was unanimously perceived as reading either above or at the class average. The second pattern occurred when the teacher and the family member agreed, but the child did not. In this pattern, three-fourths of the families scored the child as reading below the class average, while three-fourths of the children self-scored as reading above or at the class average. When a child who self-scored as reading at the class average was asked why she thought she was a better reader, she said, "I read to my friend and I sometimes help them to read." A third pattern is when one child self-scored as reading below the class average, while the teacher and the family scored the child as reading above the class average. Here there is a possibility of low-self esteem on the part of the child. In most instances, when the family and the child agreed, but the teacher did not, the child was most often scored as reading below the classmates.

These patterns could lead us to a number of possible conclusions. One possibility could be that of differing orientations toward education. Goldenberg et al. (2001) argue that when families feel successful, value education, and expect success from it, they work hard toward achieving it. On the contrary, when they feel unsuccessful, they do not value its importance, do not expect a high level of performance, and thus do not benefit.

Why most children self-scored as reading at the class average merits some consideration. Pretzlik and Chan (2004) caution that sometimes when comparing themselves to readers who have strong support, children might feel that they have learned the basic reading skills and, based on this, perceive themselves as similar in other respects to other readers. If this happens, it is a positive result in its own right. Such self-perceptions need to be recognized within the dual context of both the classroom and the home. When children discover that their perceived ability and actual ability are not in truth the same, it is incumbent upon educators and families to help them examine the causes for their success or failure and enable them to act accordingly (Pretzlik & Chan). Teachers need to recognize such feelings among their students and acknowledge that

some students may be considering themselves to be better readers than the teachers feel them to be. Teachers need to help these students come to terms with the realities of the situation and make progress, in spite of whatever prior experiences the teacher may have had with the student.

Views on Family Reading Practice in the Home

The result of the research in this area reveals many facets regarding the advantages of a shared understanding (and conversely the problems extant when such an understanding is not present) between the three subgroups. Interesting findings were observed from this study. For example, when the respondents agreed that the family provided reading materials to help the child read, shared reading concerns with the child's teacher, and attended reading conferences regularly, the child was always scored by all subgroups as reading above or at the class average. Most often when the family and the child agreed but the teacher did not, the child was scored as reading below his or her classmates.

These results provide cogent evidence that when individual respondents within the three subgroups establish a strong connection to each other, positive outcomes occur. There are several possible explanations. For instance, teachers' expectations may have influenced the uniformly high perceptions of the child's reading skills. Another possible explanation for this finding may relate to the fact that such connectivity tends to instill in each of the parties a positive attitude toward one another. "If teachers … know the parents, they treat the student better. It makes a difference when the faculty knows the parents are involved and that the parents do care" (Barge & Loges, 2003, p. 146). Teachers tend to rate the children from minority families as less competent academically and have lower expectations for the child's future success than do parents (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003), especially when such perceptions stem from selective or negative memories or perceptions of a child based on past experience. The present study suggests that maintaining a positive view is an essential means to achieving positive results, constituting a necessary and important pre-condition for implementing a sharing of perspectives regarding the individual child's efforts in reading, whether at home or school.

In some instances in the study, adult family members perceived their child to be a better reader, but reported not reading with or to a child at home (reading practice). Similar findings were reported by authors (Chavkin & Williams; 1993; Dauber & Epstein; 1993) noting an overall decline in the number of families who assisted their children in school activities as the child advanced from lower to higher grade levels. Some families interviewed in the present study revealed that they never read to their children because they thought their children were doing well in school. Others thought reading to a child every day was their responsibility as parents.

Other striking evidence from this study relates to whether or not the teacher shared or the family used reading strategies at home. Teachers seemed to have little knowledge of whether or not they have ever shared reading strategies with families. However, family members showed that they were using strategies similar to those teachers used in classrooms. Such findings prompt one to make unflattering conjectures as to teachers' awareness of what was addressed during the Every Child Reads parent education sessions. Future research needs to investigate more on the content of family-teacher meetings and parent sessions with a follow-up on how meeting information is implemented.

Edwards et al. (1999) have further argued that the importance of fostering understanding between all parties concerned with the child is typically overlooked. A more thoroughly developed approach to a shared understanding involves a concerted effort, primarily on the part of the teachers and parents. When implemented, it correctly allows both the teacher and the adult family member to assume more responsibilities in meeting the child's literacy needs in a collaborative way. This would present the child with greater opportunities to make the best use of the home and school learning environments. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Burrow's (1995) study of parental involvement with elementary-age children concluded that most parents, not surprisingly, wanted to help their children succeed but worried and reflected on the role they should take and how to handle those roles successfully. Most seemed unfamiliar with ways they might optimize their child's home environment.

Narratives regarding the perceived opportunities for or barriers to families' decisions to assist their children to become better readers appeared to be clustered around five predominant ideas. These ideas are impediments to assisting the child in his/her learning development: (a) the nature of school-home communication, (b) the lack of opportunity for interaction, (c) the families' work schedule, (d) the differing perceptions among individuals within the subgroups, and (e) differing expectations. When there was disagreement during interviews, both the family and the teacher accounts reflected constant uncertainties concerning the other's knowledge about whether a family practiced literacy in the home. Addressing such concerns would bridge many of the differences and assuage numerous doubts. All viewed their perceptions and actions as legitimate within their own contexts (i.e., home or school). It appeared that some adult family members and the corresponding teachers felt a sense of isolation from each other that inhibited collaboration. Parents expressed, in particular, a desire for more positive communication from teachers.

It is encouraging to note, however, that each of the subgroups perceived opportunities to strengthen families' partnerships with teachers as they strived to assist the child to become a better reader. For instance, adult family members

wished their children could have more positive attitudes toward their teachers, and they regretted not having found time to attend the Every Child Reads parent education sessions. Children wished their families could buy them more reading materials and read to them more frequently. Also, teachers wished to place children with reading difficulties into a remedial reading program and also wished children could receive more attention from adult family members. These were arrays of opportunities perceived by the subgroups. However, such wishes can easily be a rhetorical exercise with little hope of future implementation if those involved do not find a way to translate their words into concrete actions. Unless someone is willing to take initiative, such wishes are fruitless.

Limitations and Future Research

The lack of shared understanding regarding family reading practices, as reported by the respondents, warrants serious consideration. The findings in the present study are limited in terms of their overall generality. The present study is a preliminary attempt to match the views of the African American family, the child, and the teacher relative to their perceptions of the family's role in assisting the child to become a better reader. Further research is needed in this area involving families, children, and teachers from diverse settings (e.g., how might an African American student be regarded or perceived by an African American teacher as opposed to teachers of European origin). Nonetheless, in spite of its relative small sampling size, the findings from this study add to our understanding of the importance of facilitating more open communication exchanges between adult family members, children, and teachers. Replicating this study with a larger sample may offer further insight and extremely valuable information which could pave the way to conceiving and effectively designing literacy plans that are more inclusive and practical in their results.

Concluding Thoughts

Data from this study suggest that educators should consider multiple sources of information in order to better assist a child's reading efforts. One route to follow that is often overlooked is to encourage a better level of shared understanding between the adult family member, the child, and the child's teacher regarding their respective expectations and goals concerning the child's reading effort and achievement. Differences among the subgroups' perceptions do not necessarily signify conflict, but may reflect each subgroup's unique experiences. As Conoley (1989) stated, to fail to know the family and the school is to fail to know the child.

A lack of one-to-one or collective communication between educators, African American families, and students may erode the likelihood of a shared understanding of the process variables related to successful reading practices. African American families and teachers may be in opposition, frequently unknowingly, due to conflicting interests, values, and expectations. All of these can result in the parties not being able to attain consensus. Collaborative efforts are vital to enhancing a child's reading development. The challenge that has emerged from this and similar studies is to find ways to overcome the perceived barriers and to bring about more opportunities for a mutual understanding between the individual African American family, child, and teacher regardless of their beliefs and ethnic background. This means creating greater and more frequent channels of communication.

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Shadrack G. Msengi is an assistant professor and director of reading programs at Notre Dame de Namur University. His research interests include family-school literacy connections, family literacy practices and diversity, and domains of instructional technology. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Shadrack G. Msengi, School of Education and Leadership, Notre Dame de Namur University, 1500 Ralston Avenue, Belmont, CA, 94002-1908 or by email: smsengi@ndnu.edu.

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An Exploratory Study of Mexican-Origin Fathers' Involvement in Their Child's Education: The Role of Linguistic Acculturation

Vera Lopez

Abstract

The present exploratory study examined the involvement of 77 Mexican-origin fathers in their school-age (grades 4-6) child's education. Fathers were classified into one of three groups based on their linguistic acculturation status. The three groups were predominantly English-speakers (n = 25), English/Spanish-speakers (n = 27), and predominantly Spanish-speakers (n = 25). Five analyses of covariances (ANCOVAs) were conducted using the following father involvement dimensions as outcomes: Perceptions of School, Positive Contacts with Teachers, Attitudes Toward Parental Responsibility, School Involvement (e.g., participation in school activities and events), and Home Involvement (e.g., helping with homework, developing an environment conducive to education). Family socioeconomic status was included as a covariate in all five ANCOVAs. Results indicated that Spanish-speaking fathers reported more negative perceptions of their child's school, less positive contacts with their child's teachers, and were less involved in their child's school than either English/Spanish-speaking or English-speaking fathers. No group differences existed on the other two father involvement indices. Interpretations of the study's results and research implications are presented.

Key Words: father involvement, parent involvement, Mexican-origin fathers, linguistic acculturation

Introduction

Mexican-origin youth are at high risk for academic underachievement and dropping out of school (Census Bureau 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, as presented by Jensen, 2001), and this is especially true for students classified as Non-English Proficient (NEP) or Limited English Proficient (LEP; U.S. Department of Education, 2000, 2001). The need for finding ways to help Mexican-origin youth, particularly those who are NEP/LEP or who come from NEP/LEP family backgrounds, should be a high priority for educators, researchers, and policymakers. Parental involvement, particularly as it applies to fathers with limited English-speaking abilities, represents one key area on which to focus. For this reason, the intent of the present study is to explore how Mexican-origin fathers at different points along the linguistic acculturation continuum (Spanish-speakers, English/Spanish-speakers, English-speakers) differ with regard to their involvement in their elementary school-age child's education. Furthermore, because parental involvement is a multidimensional concept that has been variously defined in terms of educational expectations and aspirations (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Keith & Lichtman, 1994; Spera, 2005), parent-child communication (Keith & Lichtman), parent-teacher communication (Epstein, 1991), participation in school events and activities (Bogenschneider, 1997; Desimone, 2001; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997), and establishing a home environment conducive to education (Desimone), the present study will focus on how fathers of varying linguistic acculturation levels differ across a number of involvement domains.

Linguistic Acculturation

Acculturation is a complex, bi-directional, multidimensional process involving the cultural transformation of one culture as a result of its constant contact with another culture (Cúellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). Language use represents one dimension of this process. Items assessing language use are a significant component of multidimensional acculturation measures and continue to account for the majority of the variance in the acculturation construct (Marín & Gamba, 1996; Marín & Marín, 1991; Marín, Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Pérez-Stable, 1987). Recognizing this, a number of researchers have relied solely on language-based assessments of acculturation (Cúellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Epstein, Botvin, & Díaz, 1998; Marín et al.; Plunkett & Bámaca-Gómez, 2003). The present study focuses on the linguistic dimension of acculturation because language is a crucial dimension of acculturation and is relevant to the understanding of why and how Mexican-origin fathers are involved in their children's education. Linguistic acculturation also

represents a good proxy of other acculturation dimensions (Berry, 1980; Marín & Gamba; Marín & Marín; Marín et al.; Padilla, 1980) that might be related to the degree to which fathers are involved in their children's schooling.

Linguistic Acculturation and Parental Involvement

Ability to speak English is an important skill that is related to the degree to which Mexican-origin parents believe they have the linguistic skills needed to help their children succeed academically (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Hyslop, 2000; Inger, 1992; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). These beliefs are often rooted in reality given that many school teachers and personnel do not speak Spanish (Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998). As a result of this linguistic barrier, Spanish-speaking parents cannot effectively communicate with teachers about their child's overall academic and behavioral performance. Additionally, linguistic barriers may limit parents' ability to be active participants in school-related events and activities. Faced with these linguistic barriers, NEP/LEP Mexican-origin parents might be more inclined than their English proficient counterparts to develop negative perceptions of their children's teachers and school, ultimately leading them to decrease their school-based involvement.

Because linguistic acculturation is a proxy for acculturation, any interpretation of its correlation with parental involvement attitudes and behaviors must be interpreted with this in mind. Put another way, linguistic acculturation differences may be related to other acculturative dimensions that are correlated with, yet distinct, from the linguistic dimension. For example, while many Latino immigrant parents are concerned with and do express high expectations for their children's education (Qian & Blair, 1999), they also maintain beliefs about their role and place in schools that are in stark contrast to how teachers and schools view "good parents" (Floyd, 1998; Trueba & Delgado-Gaitain, 1988). More specifically, research suggests that many Latino parents define the parental role in terms of providing nurturance and teaching morals, respect, and good behavior, whereas they view the school's role as instilling knowledge (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). As a result of this cultural division, both parents and teachers might develop feelings of frustration. For less acculturated parents, these feelings might result in the development of negative perceptions toward their child's teachers and school, eventually resulting in decreased school involvement.

Alternatively, different levels of involvement across linguistic acculturation levels might be indicative of cultural values related to gender roles. Although some research indicates that Latino fathers want to be as involved in their children's lives as mothers (Baca Zinn, 1972; Hawkes & Taylor, 1975), many

researchers continue to depict Latino fathers as authoritarian heads of households whose primary duty is to provide for the family (Galanti, 2003). These inconsistencies may result from failing to take into account acculturation differences. It may be that less acculturated fathers maintain more traditional patriarchal views of fathering, whereas more acculturated fathers maintain more egalitarian views.

Socioeconomic Status, Acculturation, and Parental Involvement

Socioeconomic status (SES) also must be taken into account when exploring fathers' involvement across linguistic acculturation levels. When we consider that lower income parents often have less flexible schedules than higher income parents, it is easy to see why the former might not be as involved in their children's schooling as they might like. Matters become even more complicated when linguistic acculturation is added to the mix. NEP/LEP parents, who are already at a linguistic disadvantage when it comes to obtaining employment, may be hesitant to risk upsetting their employers by asking for time off to visit with teachers or attend school functions (Fuentes, Cantu, & Stechuk, 1996). They also may not have the time or the perceived skills to actively foster their child's learning at home. In this way, low SES combined with decreased linguistic acculturation abilities can conspire to keep parents from being involved in their child's education (Tinker, 2002). For this reason, SES is controlled for in the present study.

Study Purpose

To reiterate, the current study will explore how fathers at different points along the linguistic acculturation continuum (Spanish-speakers, English/Spanish-speakers, English-speakers) differ with regard to their involvement in their 4^{th}-6^{th} grade child's education. Additionally, because it has been well established that parental involvement is a multidimensional concept, the present study will examine fathers' involvement levels across a number of attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. Three of the indices – Perceptions of School, Positive Contacts with Teachers, and Attitudes Toward Parental Responsibility – are attitudinal measures, whereas the other two measures – School Involvement and Home Involvement – are behavioral measures. The following hypotheses were developed based on an examination of the Latino parental involvement and father involvement literatures:

- Both English-speakers and English/Spanish-speakers will report more positive perceptions of their child's school than Spanish-speakers.
- Both English-speakers and English/Spanish-speakers will report more positive contacts with their child's teacher than Spanish-speakers.

- Both English-speakers and English/Spanish-speakers will report more positive attitudes toward parental responsibility than Spanish-speakers.
- Both English-speakers and English/Spanish-speakers will report more involvement in their child's school than Spanish-speakers.
- Both English-speakers and English/Spanish-speakers will report higher levels of home-based direct involvement with their child than Spanish-speakers.

Method

Participants

This sample was obtained from a larger random sample of 189 Mexican-origin and European American families who had a 4th-6th grade child (target child) attending an elementary school in a major metropolitan area in the Southwestern United States. Of the 189 families, 123 were of Mexican descent. Eighty-three of these 123 families had a father living in the home for at least six months; 77 of these fathers agreed to participate and are the focus of the current study. While most fathers were biological, there were five stepfathers and one adoptive father.

Fathers were categorized into one of three groups, based on their preferred language use/linguistic acculturation status. The first group of fathers (n_1 = 25) reported that they preferred to speak mostly English or only English. The second group of fathers (n_2 = 27) reported that they preferred to speak English and Spanish equally. The third group of fathers (n_3=25) reported that they preferred to speak only or mostly Spanish.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicated that fathers across the three groups did not differ in terms of age. In contrast, chi-square tests of independence indicated significant relationships existed between linguistic acculturation group and country of origin, and between linguistic acculturation group and highest education level completed. English-speaking fathers were more likely to have been born in the U.S. and to have completed a higher level of education than Spanish-speaking fathers, who were more likely to have been born in Mexico and to have completed a lower level of education. Means, standard deviations, and frequency data are presented in Table 1 for these demographic variables.

Table 1. Sample Demographics by Fathers' Linguistic Acculturation Group

	English-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)	English/Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n =27)	Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)	F or χ^2
Age				
Mean (SD)	38 (5.73)	36 (6.41)	36 (6.87)	.89
Country of Origin				
U.S.	17 (68%)	14 (52%)	2 (8%)	25.59***
Mexico	8 (32%)	13 (48%)	23 (92%)	
Highest Education**				
Less than 12th Grade	5 (20%)	5 (18%)	15 (60%)	
High School Graduate or Equivalent	6 (24%)	11 (41%)	5 (20%)	18.59*
Some College/ Technical Training	11 (44%)	11 (41%)	4 (16%)	
BA/BS	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	
Post-Graduate	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ ****Level Completed in U.S. or Mexico

School, Student, and Personnel Characteristics

The school in this study serves 4th-6th grades only. Out of six possible ranking levels – Failing, Underperforming, Performing, Performing Plus, Highly Performing, Excelling – the school was ranked "performing" at the time of the data collection phase indicating that state performance standards were met. Of the 27 teachers and 5 administrative/specialist personnel (e.g., Principal, School Psychologist, Librarian) at the school, only 2 (6%) were classified as Bilingual. Both of these individuals were Latino teachers. In contrast, 249 (57%) of the school's 438 students were Latino. Of these, 104 (42%) were classified as "English Learners." Of the total student population, 86% were eligible for reduced or free lunch (Arizona Department of Education, 2006).

Procedure

Various efforts were made to recruit Mexican-origin fathers including sending home initial letters and consent forms asking fathers to participate in a study on fathers' involvement in their child's education, follow-up phone calls by bilingual interviewers in which fathers were asked what language they preferred the interview to take place in, and allowing the interviews to take place in the fathers' home on evenings and weekends. Interviewers from Mexico

who self-identified as native Spanish-speakers were specifically recruited and matched with Spanish-speaking fathers.

All interviewers were trained in a university setting and were undergraduate or graduate students in either an interdisciplinary or social science program. Interviewers recorded fathers' answers on a standardized interview protocol. In order to reduce possible bias from variations in literacy levels, interviewers read each item and its possible responses out loud in the participants' preferred language. Fathers were paid $25 each for their participation.

Measures

The standardized interview questionnaire contained demographic questions and father involvement measures. All items and measures were available in both English and Spanish. All Spanish items were translated and back translated to and from Spanish by native Spanish speakers from Mexico.

Demographic Variables

Demographic information was obtained using a questionnaire in which respondents were asked to provide their age, country of origin (U.S. = 1; Mexico = 2), and highest level of education completed in either the U.S. or Mexico (Less than 12th Grade = 1; High School Graduate or Equivalent = 2; Some College or Technical Training = 3; BA/BS = 4; Post Graduate = 5). Participants also provided information on their child's age and family data such as annual gross family income.

Linguistic Acculturation

The measure of linguistic acculturation used by Epstein, Botvin, and Díaz (1998; 2000) and Plunkett and Bámaca-Gómez (2003) was used in this study. Fathers were asked what language they usually speak with their child at home. Response options were: "only English," "mostly English," "English and Spanish," "mostly Spanish," and "only Spanish." Because, with acculturation, language use can remain Spanish, become bilingual, or change to English, the measure was collapsed into three categories: 1 = Only or Mostly English; 2 = English and Spanish; and 3 = Only or Mostly Spanish.

Fathers' Involvement in Child's Education

Five measures of fathers' involvement in their child's education or school were included in the present study. Each scale either came directly or was adapted from Epstein and Salinas (1993).

1. Perceptions of School. This scale contains six items. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of the target child's school. Sample items include: "This is a very good school," and "This school is one of the best schools for students." Response options are: 1 = Disagree Strongly; 2 = Disagree a Little; 3 =

Agree a Little; and 4 = Agree Strongly. Cronbach's alphas for this measure for the overall sample was .77, indicating adequate reliability.

2. Positive Contacts with Teachers. This scale contains four items. Higher scores are indicative of more positive contacts with the target child's teachers. Sample items include: "When my child has a problem at school, the teachers are very helpful," and "My child's teacher regularly lets me know when my child has done good things at school." Response options are: 1 = Disagree Strongly; 2 = Disagree a Little; 3 = Agree a Little; and 4 = Agree Strongly. Cronbach's alpha for this scale for this sample was .75, suggesting acceptable reliability.

3. Attitudes Toward Parental Responsibility. This scale contains eight items. Higher scores are indicative of attitudes consistent with the notion that parents should take an active role in their children's education. Sample items include: "Children do better in school if parents regularly check on their progress," and "It is the parents' responsibility to emphasize to children the value of getting an education." Response options are: 1 = Disagree Strongly; 2 = Disagree a Little; 3 = Agree a Little; and 4 = Agree Strongly. Cronbach's alphas for this measure for this sample was .93, indicating strong reliability.

4. School Involvement. This subscale contains four items specific to parent involvement in school activities or events. High scores indicate higher levels of involvement. Sample questions include: "In the past year, I visited my child's classroom," and "In the past year, I went to a PTA/PTO meeting." Response options are: 1 = Never; 2 = Once or Twice; 3 = A Few Times; and 4 = Many Times. Cronbach's alpha for this measure for the overall sample was .84, suggesting strong reliability.

5. Home Involvement. This scale includes six items. Higher scores on this scale indicate higher levels of involvement in home-based activities focused directly on the child and his/her education. Sample items include: "In the past year, I listened to my child read," and "In the past year, I helped my child with homework." Response options are: 1 = Never; 2 = Once or Twice; 3 = A Few Times; and 4 = Many Times. Cronbach's alpha for this measure for the overall sample was .87, indicative of strong reliability.

Results

The statistical procedure used in the current study was Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). ANCOVA is a useful procedure when dealing with non-equivalent intact groups because it allows researchers to eliminate initial group differences on **y** which are confounded with **x** so that if a group effect does occur, researchers can be more confident that differences were not simply the result of pre-existing group differences (Keselman et al., 1998). Two

pre-existing group differences were explored: child's age by linguistic acculturation group and family SES by linguistic acculturation group. ANOVA results indicated that fathers in the three groups did not differ in terms of their child's age, but did differ with regard to family income (See Table 2).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Fathers for Tested Covariates: Child's Age and Family Income (df = 2, 74)

	English-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)		English/ Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n = 27)		Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)			
Covariates	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	Tukey's Test[a]
Child's Age	10.21	.80	10.30	.79	10.27	.82	.61	--------
Family Income[b]	33,372	3,022	32,000	3,989	24,760	2,845	13.86***	1-3, 2-3

[a] Post-hoc Tukey's Test distinguished groups separated by hyphen as significantly different from each other at the .05 level of significance.
[b] in U.S. Dollars
*** $p < .001$

Tukey's post hoc tests indicated that both English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers had a higher mean family income than Spanish-speaking fathers. Thus, in order to parcel out the effect of SES, family income was controlled for in the five one-way ANCOVAs used to examine whether fathers' involvement, as measured by the five subscales (Perceptions of School, Positive Contacts with Teachers, Attitudes Toward Parental Responsibility, School Involvement, Home Involvement), differed by linguistic acculturation level. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was examined for all five ANCOVAs using Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances (Stevens, 1996). The assumption was not violated in any of the five cases, indicating that the linguistic acculturation groups were homogenous in terms of their variances.

Results of the first ANCOVA indicated that there was a significant effect of linguistic acculturation level on fathers' perceptions of their child's school. Planned contrasts indicated that both English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers reported more positive perceptions of their child's school than Spanish-speaking fathers. A significant main effect for linguistic acculturation on fathers' positive contacts with teachers was also found. Planned contrasts indicated that both English and English/Spanish-speaking fathers have more positive experiences with their child's teachers than Spanish-speaking fathers. No significant effect of linguistic acculturation level on attitudes toward parental responsibility was found. However, there was a significant effect of linguistic

acculturation level on fathers' involvement in their child's school. Planned contrasts indicated that English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers were more involved in school events and activities than Spanish-speaking fathers. Finally, no effect of linguistic acculturation level was found on fathers' home-based involvement with their child. See Table 3 for statistical results.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Father Involvement Dimensions (df = 2, 74)

	English-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)		English/Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n = 27)		Spanish-Speaking Fathers (n = 25)			
Sub-Scales	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	Tukey's Test[a]
Perceptions of School	3.58	.45	3.52	.43	3.14	.53	4.19*	1-3, 2-3
Positive Contacts with Teachers	3.21	.75	3.30	.76	2.76	.80	3.10*	1-3, 2-3
Attitudes Toward Parental Responsibility	3.77	.16	3.69	.18	3.67	.21	1.63	--------
School Involvement	2.02	.45	2.18	.48	1.64	.42	4.83*	1-3, 2-3
Home Involvement	3.25	.52	3.29	.60	3.30	.62	.24	--------

[a] Post-hoc Tukey's Test distinguished groups separated by hyphen as significantly different from each other at the .05 level of significance.

* $p < .05$

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the present study was to conduct a preliminary explanation of whether Mexican-origin fathers' involvement in their child's education varied by fathers' linguistic acculturation status. It was hypothesized that English and English/Spanish-speaking fathers would report more positive perceptions of their child's school, more positive contacts with teachers, more positive attitudes toward parental responsibility, more school involvement, and higher levels of home-based involvement. Three of the hypotheses were supported.

As expected, English and English/Spanish-speaking fathers reported more positive perceptions of their child's school than did Spanish-speaking fathers. This finding makes sense in light of previous research, which indicates that many immigrant Latino parents feel unwelcome in their child's schools due to

a variety of linguistic (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Inger, 1992), cultural (Hyslop, 2000; Trumbull et al., 2001), and socioeconomic barriers. As a result of these barriers, the Spanish-speaking fathers may have developed more negative perceptions of their child's school. However, this remains speculation because school process data and information on fathers' explanations for their perceptions were not collected.

English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers were more likely than Spanish-speaking fathers to report positive contacts with their child's teachers. This finding is consistent with previous research, which indicates that many Latino parents, particularly those who are less acculturated, feel intimidated by teachers (Hyslop, 2000; Inger, 1992). These feelings of intimidation may be further heightened when parents are faced with the difficult challenge of trying to communicate with English-speaking teachers. Because most school personnel and teachers do not speak Spanish (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Inger, 1992), communication about grades, behavior, and homework can be very difficult and frustrating for both parents and teachers. As a result, Spanish-speaking parents might develop negative perceptions of their child's teachers. This might have been the case in the present study given that only 2 of the 35 teachers and professional staff members were bilingual.

As hypothesized, English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers reported higher levels of direct school involvement than Spanish-speaking fathers even after controlling for family SES, a finding consistent with previous research which indicates that many Latino, Spanish-speaking parents have a difficult time engaging in school activities due to language barriers (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Hyslop, 2000). If Spanish-speaking parents attend meetings or try to volunteer in their child's school, they cannot understand what is being said (Aspiazu et al., 1998). Because of these linguistic barriers, Spanish-speaking parents may be less inclined than their English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking counterparts to be directly involved in their child's school-based activities. Indeed, previous research indicates that differences in languages between parents and school personnel and a lack of bilingual staff contribute to parents' feelings of powerlessness and decreased likelihood of interacting with their children's schools (Chavkin & Gonzalez; Hyslop).

Because linguistic acculturation is a proxy of other cultural shifts, it makes sense to consider the possibility that the aforementioned findings might be a reflection of gender role values or parenting responsibility beliefs as opposed to English skills. However, these explanations are not likely for the present sample because fathers, irrespective of linguistic acculturation status, reported high mean scores on the parenting responsibility scale. That is, in contrast to what was hypothesized, the fathers in this study believe that parents, not just

mothers or schools, should be responsible for children's education. This finding is in contrast to a number of studies, which indicate that Latino parents see a sharp divide between parental and school roles (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). This finding is also in contrast to a number of anecdotal studies which suggest that Latino fathers define their roles in terms of patriarchal authority in which the father's primary role is to work hard, provide financially, protect the family, and be the decision maker (Galanti, 2003). Differences between this study's findings and those of previous researchers may be a result of sampling or data collection differences: Much of the previous work on Latino childrearing beliefs and gender role expectations has focused almost exclusively on mothers, generally not taking acculturation or Latino sub-ethnic differences into account, and has been largely anecdotal in nature.

The final hypothesis concerned fathers' home involvement levels. In contrast to what was hypothesized, no significant differences existed across linguistic acculturation groups. Fathers, irrespective of linguistic acculturation status, did engage in home involvement activities. This finding is consistent with what would be expected given that the fathers – regardless of linguistic acculturation status – generally believe that parents, as opposed to mothers only, should be involved in their child's education.

Study Limitations and Strengths

Several limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting this study's findings. First, only the linguistic aspect of acculturation was examined. A more complex and multidimensional measure of acculturation (Cúellar et al., 1995) would have provided specific information about how linguistic acculturation above and beyond other acculturative dimensions (i.e., value changes) impacted fathers' involvement. A second limitation of the study concerns the measure of SES, which was based on fathers' self-report of his family's gross annual income in the absence of family size data. Per capita income would have been a more sensitive measure of SES. A third study limitation is the small sample size, which resulted in decreased power as well as a limited ability to generalize the study's results. Studies with larger samples would provide a stronger test of the hypotheses. On the other hand, the fact that these results supported the hypotheses despite the sample size issues is encouraging. Finally, school-level data and data on fathers' explanations for their involvement levels would have facilitated the interpretation of the study's findings.

Even though this study was exploratory in nature and had several limitations, it also has several strengths. First, this is the only known study that has examined Mexican-origin fathers' involvement in their child's education as it varies by linguistic acculturation status. Second, most studies on parental

or father involvement specifically focus on only one or two parental involvement dimensions. This study examined five dimensions of father involvement. Finally, most parental involvement studies focus on mothers and on Latinos generally. This study's unique contribution is that it focused on Mexican-origin fathers, an understudied group in the vast parental involvement literature.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study represents a preliminary, exploratory examination of fathers' involvement in their child's education. However, as previously indicated, data on fathers' explanations for why they viewed their child's teachers and school in a certain way as well as data on why they chose certain types of involvement levels would have illuminated the quantitative results. More specifically, future researchers could ask Mexican-origin fathers about what contributes to their involvement decisions. Future researchers could also collect school process data in order to determine what resources and outreach efforts schools use to promote fathers' involvement. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) model, which states that parents choose certain types of involvement activities in response to the specific types of skills and knowledge that they possess, the total demands on their time and energy, and the school's specific requests for parents' involvement, would be an ideal framework for such a study.

Future research is also needed to understand if and how father involvement dimensions are differentially predictive of children's school achievement. For example, the present study found that fathers, irrespective of linguistic acculturation status, are involved in their child's education when it comes to being involved in home-based activities designed to promote children's learning. Is this type of father involvement predictive of school achievement? What other types of father involvement activities are predictive of school achievement? Future research studies are needed to address these questions.

Conclusion

This study's results indicate that Spanish-speaking fathers report less positive views of their child's school and teachers than English-speaking and English/Spanish-speaking fathers. Additionally, they are less likely to be involved in their child's school. These results suggest that more emphasis needs to be focused on engaging limited-English proficient fathers, particularly in light of previous research, which indicates that fathers can play an important role in increasing children's academic achievement (Blanchard & Billard, 1971; Nord, 1998; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997; Radin, 1976). Understanding why and how fathers of different cultural backgrounds are involved in their children's

education is critical in terms of developing appropriate prevention and intervention programs designed to impact children's academic achievement. This research study, though small in scope, is a step in this direction.

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Vera Lopez is an assistant professor in the School of Justice and Social Inquiry, an interdisciplinary department at Arizona State University. Her research interests include understanding Latino/a parental involvement strategies from a cultural perspective, as well as understanding how issues related to race and ethnicity impact adolescents' propensities to engage in delinquent behaviors. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Vera Lopez, P.O. Box 870403, School of Justice & Social Inquiry, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-0403, or e-mail Vera.Lopez@asu.edu.

Amistades: The Development of Relationships Between Preservice Teachers and Latino Families

John A. Sutterby, Renée Rubin, and Michelle Abrego

Abstract

Preservice teachers from a Hispanic-serving university and Latino families reflected on their interactions during an after-school children's tutoring program conducted at an elementary school. This paper focuses on issues that both preservice teachers and families found important to communication and relationship building. These issues were valuing what families bring to the educational process, congruency in the interpretation of teacher roles, and the importance of language to communication and relationship building.

Key Words: family involvement, Latino families, teacher education, qualitative methods, language, culture, bilingual teachers, preservice teachers, field-based learning

Introduction

> Ustedes, padres de familia, jugaron un papel muy importante para que esta actividad finalizar exitosamente. Reitero mis agradecimientos a todo el equipo de trabajo, que intervino en esta actividad. (*All of you, heads of families, played an important role in making this activity a success. I give my thanks to everyone in the team who took part in this activity.*)
>
> —Preservice Teacher

[Note: Throughout this article, written quotes from participants in both English and Spanish have not been corrected for spelling or grammar errors to preserve authenticity.]

From the Fall of 2002, a reading tutoring program has been arranged as part of preservice teachers' coursework. Every semester for 10 weeks, between 35 and 60 preservice teachers work with prekindergarten through first grade children to provide one-on-one tutoring. As part of the program, a family involvement component requires the preservice teachers to communicate with the family before and after the tutoring session. We found that powerful relationships can be developed between preservice teachers and families if given the opportunity to engage with each other in a dialogue. At the end of a one-semester tutoring program, one tutor wrote a letter (quoted in part above) to the parents of her student and volunteered to read it to all the families to thank them for the effort they had made in attending the program. She also thanked them for giving her the opportunity to work as a tutor. Her letter and many other communications show that structured engagement between preservice teachers and families leads to the development of *amistades*, or friendships.

Family Involvement and Preservice Teachers

The tutoring program provided preservice teachers with structured opportunities to interact and communicate with families prior to becoming certified teachers. Preservice teachers were provided with conversation starters each week to encourage interaction with the families. These prompts helped the preservice teachers elicit information from the families about home activities and interests as well as finding out what they wanted for their children from the tutoring program, for example, "Please explain to the family member what you will do/did. Please ask the family member what type of things they do at home to promote reading, writing, listening, and speaking." These conversation starters often were the beginning of longer discussions in which both preservice teachers and families shared a variety of experiences and information.

Providing such opportunities to preservice teachers is significant, because preparation for working with families is generally limited during preservice teachers' education (Graue, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Young & Hite, 1994) as well as when they enter the workforce (Epstein et al., 2002). As a result, teachers often lack the confidence to work with families or may have negative attitudes about family involvement (Rasinski, 2001; Tichenor, 1997, 1998).

Teachers who have received training with families in their preservice teacher preparation program report feeling well-equipped to use a variety of family involvement practices (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Katz, 1999; Morris & Taylor, 1998). Additionally, these teachers are less likely to stereotype single parents, working class parents, or parents with less formal education (Epstein et al., 2002).

Findings confirm that teachers' practices and specific school programs are the strongest predictor of family involvement at school and at home (Dauber

& Epstein, 1989). In general, proactive communication by the school can increase family involvement (Feuerstein, 2000). Teachers note that communication between families and teachers is the essence of Latino family involvement (Gaitan, 2004). Therefore, structured opportunities in preservice training allow preservice teachers to enhance communication skills that help develop meaningful relationships with Latino families.

Differing interpretations of family-teacher roles pose a barrier to communication and relationship building. School staff may interpret Latino families' actions as disinterest in their child's schooling, while families consider themselves as having fulfilled their family responsibilities by caring for basic needs and instilling respect for authority (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Gaitan, 2004; McCollum, 1996; Paratore et al., 1995; Valdés, 1996). Understanding and respecting how families interpret their role in schooling enhances communication. To understand families, teachers must be cognizant of the diversity among families. Teachers also should be cognizant of their own role in the family-teacher partnership (Broussard, 2003; Keyes, 2002; McCarthy, 2000).

Family involvement programs can pose a barrier to communication and the development of relationships if such programs assume families need to be changed to be successful in working with their own children (Gaitan, 2004; McCollum, 1996). Such attitudes lead teachers to engage in deficit thinking as opposed to building upon cultural strengths (Peña, 2000; Valdés, 1996; Valencia, 1997). Teachers need to value and build upon the background knowledge and support that families provide their children (McCaleb, 2001; Moll, Velez Ibanez, & Greenberg, 1990). Teachers should consider what is known about culturally different families, their attitudes toward education, and how families support their children's education in order to enhance family-teacher relationships (McCaleb; McCollum). Teacher education programs in the United States have not satisfactorily addressed diverse family styles and cultural backgrounds or recognized that all families have strengths. Teacher education should introduce potential teachers to authentic school-based experiences earlier in their college experiences in order to build a strong foundation for successful parent-teacher communication (Tellez, 2004).

For this paper we will be describing the experiences of preservice teachers and families from the United States-Mexico border. Defining a single term for the ethnic backgrounds of this group is difficult, as a number of preferred terms (i.e., Hispanic, Mexican American, Mexicano, Chicano) are currently in use which may or may not imply distinctions (See Limón, 1994; Martínez, 1998 for a discussion). In general, we have tried to use the term selected by the participant or the author referenced. Our preferred term, Latino or Latina, is used in the global sense to cover all of our participants who come from

a Spanish-speaking heritage. This may include Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and others of Latin American descent.

Language and Culture in Teacher Preparation

The fostering of two-way communication between home and school has been acknowledged as a factor in high performing schools serving Latino students (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). Gaitan (2004) recognizes the sharing of information between home and school as a necessary ingredient to successful communication with Latino families. Such sharing involves educators elaborating on what is happening in school and learning about the child's experience in the family. Teachers who employ two-way communication enhance overall communication with families and demonstrate a valuing of the child's home experiences (McCarthy, 2000). Implicit in communicating with families is the issue of removing language differences. The lack of bilingual school staff is seen as a barrier to communication efforts, leading parents to feel excluded from the school process (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Gaitan; McCollum, 1996).

Preparing teachers for working in multicultural contexts has focused on preparing European American teachers to work in culturally different contexts (e.g., Gonzalez-Mena, 2001; Kharem & Villaverde, 2002). Research on preparing ethnic minority teachers has focused primarily on recruitment, retention, and barriers to education (e.g., Clark & Flores, 2002; Milk, Mercado, & Sapiens, 1992). This research looks at ethnic minority preservice teachers working with diverse families.

Ethnic minority teachers bring unique cultural and linguistic abilities to their work with diverse families. Trueba (1998) describes a Chicano teacher's ability to work with Mexican immigrant children and their families. Teacher Manuel uses both Spanish and English in the classroom and uses culturally appropriate ways of interacting with the students: "…the relationship between a Mexican teacher and his or her students is of a different quality. For example….There is a conspicuous display of love and affection" (p. 15). The ability to relate to families is important in that a congruence exists between the cultural communication patterns of the families and educators.

On the other hand, Mexican American ethnic identity is not a monolithic characteristic, rather it is extremely complex, reflecting the influences of language, assimilation, socioeconomic status, and race (Richardson, 1999). Educational environments often attempt to assimilate Latino children by enforcing English language instruction and by punishing students for using Spanish in all contexts, including on playgrounds. This attempted assimilation often leads to feelings of inadequacy and develops an "us" vs. "them" dichotomy,

which can lead to conflicts between less culturally assimilated individuals and individuals who more closely associate with United States culture (Martínez, 1998; Sutterby, Ayala, & Murillo, 2005). Tellez (2004) cautions against the assumption that Latino teachers always understand Latino culture:

> We might argue that a third generation Latino teacher…may have a difficult time understanding, much less legitimating, the culture of a family recently emigrated from rural Mexico. Such a family may have little understanding of formal schooling, no experience of urban life and speak not Spanish but one of the indigenous languages of Mexico. In this case cultural verification or affirmation is unlikely and the Latino teacher may be as disadvantaged as the European-American, monolingual English teacher. (p. 52)

Another aspect of teacher education is preparation for communicating with families that speak a language other than English. Teachers who are able to communicate effectively with families avoid conflicts with families and are better able to develop understandings with families (Chamberlain, 2005). Teachers preparing to work with Spanish-speaking families often need to develop their Spanish language proficiency. However, many educators trained to work in bilingual classrooms have difficulty communicating in Spanish (Guerrero, 2003). Preservice teachers preparing to work with Spanish-speaking children and families often come from homes where Spanish is spoken, but they have limited exposure to academic Spanish (Sutterby, Ayala, & Murillo, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

> Preparation to teach in a pluralistic society results from authentic experiences and instruction that readies prospective teachers for real-world settings. (Izquierdo, Ligons, & Erwin, 1998, p. 3)

Keyes (2002) describes the complex arrangement of factors critical for the development of parent-teacher relationships. These factors include the cultural and language backgrounds of parents and teachers. Our framework is based primarily on two theories, social constructivism and culturally relevant instruction. Social constructivism, for us, is based on the idea that knowledge is learned in a shared context and not solely in the individual. Learning is a human process based on interactions between different members of a social group (Kim, 2001). Preservice teachers' knowledge about families is socially constructed through their own histories, experiences, and interactions with others. In order to prepare preservice teachers to implement effective parental involvement, we believe that they should be involved in mediated experiences

directly with parents and families. Culturally relevant instruction is founded on the belief that understandings of events and interactions can differ depending on the cultural experiences of participants. Traditionally, the instructional practices and knowledge of European culture have been valued as the norm from which others are viewed as different and deficient. Valuing the cultural understandings of all participants in the learning process is an important way to ensure the instruction is relevant to the learner (Godina, 2003; Chamberlain, 2005). Relationships do not develop in a vacuum; effective relationships between parents/families and preservice teachers must address issues of culturally relevant practice and deficit perspectives held by many about parents and families (Izquierdo et al., 1998). Our program attempts to address both of these issues.

Methodology

Setting and Participants

Treviño Elementary (Note: all names used are pseudonyms) is located within a mile of the Texas-Mexico border. The small school (500 students) is in an older neighborhood, surrounded by small, wood-frame single family homes, most of which were built in the 1940s and 50s. All of the children at the school come from the neighborhood, which is a mix of second and third (or more) generation Latino families and recent immigrants from Mexico. The neighborhood is close to the border, so there is a fluid connection with Mexico, as family members frequently pass back and forth across the border for activities such as work, shopping, visiting family, and medical services.

The Evening Reading Improvement Program provides one-on-one afterschool tutoring at Treviño Elementary to between 35 and 60 prekindergarten to second grade children each semester. The Evening Reading Improvement Program is a collaborative partnership between the local university, which provides the tutors, and the school, which provides the participants and space for the program.

Each semester, university preservice teachers enrolled in undergraduate bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) reading courses meet at the partner elementary school to tutor once each week for ten weeks. The practical experience provided through the Evening Reading Improvement Program is in line with the School of Education's policy to include field-based experiences in as many courses as possible, and the experience does not take the place of student teaching or other classroom-based experiences.

The preservice teachers who participated in the program were seeking certification in early childhood to 4th grade bilingual or ESL. In the years 2002-2006,

the preservice teachers were overwhelmingly Latina (85%), tended to be older than teachers from traditional teacher education programs (average age 28.2 years), and many had families and children (and occasionally grandchildren) of their own (about 30%). All preservice teachers in the bilingual program spoke both English and Spanish fluently, and about half of the preservice teachers in the ESL program were fluent in both English and Spanish.

In addition to the preservice teachers, the program personnel included the three faculty members who are the authors of this article and graduate students in the educational administration program who were completing internships. These personnel were responsible for recruiting participants, organizing literacy activities for the parents, and evaluating the preservice teachers. University faculty recruit families for the program by making contact through attendance at school meetings such as open houses and the distribution of flyers explaining the program. Family participation in the program is voluntary.

The families that participated in the program, for the most part, came from the neighborhood. The school which provided the participants was 100% Latino, 99% low income, and 59% English language learners. Most parents were from working class backgrounds, although there were a few professionals such as teachers and nurses.

The Evening Reading Improvement Program began in Fall 2002 and completed its eighth academic semester of operation with the Spring 2006 semester. Data for this qualitative study were collected across four academic semesters from Fall 2003 through Spring 2005. All preservice teachers enrolled in the specified reading courses across these four academic semesters participated in the study. Family members participating in the Evening Reading Improvement Program volunteered their participation in the study. The reading improvement program had evolved to improve communication between the families and the tutors prior to this study based on data collected in previous semesters.

Data Collection

The primary data sources for this research included information from the preservice teachers and information from the families. The data sources for the preservice teachers included their weekly reflections, open-ended questions in pre- and post-surveys, and end-of-course reflections collected across four academic semesters. Reflections from each of over 160 preservice teachers were collected and analyzed. This number reflects the total number of preservice teachers participating in the study.

The data sources from the families came from focus groups conducted across three academic semesters between Fall 2003 and Spring 2005. Approximately 22 family members participated in these groups.

Reflections were written weekly by the preservice teachers on their interactions with the families. The reflections generally were 2-3 pages in length and were based on how the child interacted with the tutor and what the tutor learned from the family as well as responses to more structured questions. The preservice teachers were asked to reflect on their opinions and experiences with family involvement as part of the reflections. Two examples of questions are:

- What role do you think families should play in helping their children learn to read and write at home?
- What did you learn as a result of having the opportunity to work with families?

The instructors for the courses responded to the reflections in order to give the preservice teachers feedback and suggestions.

In addition to weekly reflections, preservice teachers were asked to complete pre- and post-semester surveys. The open-ended questions for the pre-semester survey were:

1. What do you expect the parents to be like? What makes you think that?
2. How do you think parents help their children with literacy development? What makes you think that?
3. What keeps parents from being involved in their children's education? What makes you think that?
4. How do you feel about working with Treviño parents? Why?
5. What concerns do you have about communicating with the parents?
6. In what ways were your parents involved in your education?
7. If you are a parent of a school age child, how are you involved in your child's education? If you are not a parent, how will you be involved?

The four open-ended questions for the post-semester survey were

1. After participating in tutoring, has your feeling about the role of parents in education changed at all?
2. What role do you think parents should play in helping their children learn to read and write at home?
3. What is the role of the teacher in getting parents to participate in helping their child to learn to read and write?
4. How did your level of Spanish language proficiency impact interactions with parents during the reading program?

The use of standardized open-ended questions allowed the researchers to focus the preservice teachers' attention on certain topics of interest without limiting the possible responses (Patton, 1990).

Three focus groups were conducted with families participating in the program. Each focus group consisted of 6-8 family members and was conducted

primarily in Spanish by one of the researchers. The groups were a convenience sample based on families present during the tutoring sessions who were willing to participate. All participants were female and had one to three children in the program. All were first or second generation immigrants from Mexico. Two focus groups were tape recorded and one was scripted. Data was transcribed resulting in a transcript for each focus group.

Family members participating in the focus groups were asked open-ended questions such as, "Durante el semestre han hablado con los tutores, ¿cómo han sido sus relaciones con los tutores o las tutoras?" (*During the semester you have talked to the tutors; what is your relationship with the tutors?*)

Some family members may have modified their answers to the questions because one or two of the researchers were present and other families were present. However, the focus group discussion gave the researchers an opportunity to better understand the perspectives of the families and to use follow-up questions when responses were unclear (Williams & Katz, 2001).

Data Analysis

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university's institutional review board. Part of the IRB's approval process included obtaining permission from the school district to conduct the ongoing study, as well as the appropriate use of signed and oral consent forms for all participants.

The researchers searched for patterns in the data concerning factors that facilitate or obstruct preservice teacher-family communication and relationship building on an annual basis. The researchers then categorized the data according to the patterns of culture and language that emerged (Krathwohl, 1993). The three researchers analyzed the data and searched for patterns separately, then shared their analysis, thus providing a peer check of the analysis (Carspecken, 1996). This peer checking involved weekly meetings to discuss and reflect on the progress of the program, observations, and possible changes. Multiple data sources and peer checks were used to triangulate the emerging findings and to contribute to the credibility of the study (Patton, 1990).

The overarching theme which emerged from the data analysis was the importance of relationship building between the families and the preservice teachers. Three aspects of this relationship seemed to have special importance. These aspects included (a) valuing what families bring to the educational process, (b) congruency in the interpretation of teacher roles, and (c) the importance of language to communication and relationship building.

There were some limitations to the study that may inhibit its generalization to other settings. The study was conducted at an elementary school close to the border with Mexico. The families were about 99% Latino and Spanish-

language dominant, while 85% of the preservice teachers were Latino, with about 80% of them fluent in Spanish. Although the families and preservice teachers had similarities in language and culture that may not exist in other locations, there were still some differences in education, income level, number of years in the United States, and fluency in English and Spanish.

Findings

Valuing What Families Bring to the Educational Process

Educators in the public school system have often been described as having a deficit mentality towards families from non-traditional backgrounds. The preservice teachers in our program were able to develop a relationship with families, which allowed them to see the values families brought with them to the educational enterprise.

Families were seen by the preservice teachers as having many strengths to support their children's education. These strengths included their *esfuerzo* (effort) in wanting to do all they can to help their children succeed, their *orgullo* (pride) in their children's accomplishments, and their high expectations for their children. As one preservice teacher reflected, "They want the student to prosper academically and socially in order for her to have and do more than they were able to do educationally in their home country." In addition, the preservice teachers reflected on the parents' knowledge of their children's strengths and needs, their knowledge of the Latino culture, and their use of extended family as a support system.

In contrast, some parents reported that their skills were not valued by the regular classroom teacher:

> Yo me he ofrecido con la maestra de que cuando falta la asistente, le digo si necesita algo puedo venir a ayudarle verdad con los niños o a sacar copies. Siempre me dice, yo le hablo o yo le digo después. (*I have offered to help the teacher when her assistant is absent. I can help her, right, with the children or make copies. She always tells me, "I'll call you," or "I'll tell you later."*)

The opportunities to interact directly with the families also gave the tutors opportunities to view the family members as experts. On one family literacy night, family members, preservice teachers, and children learned, sang, and did movements to traditional Mexican rhymes. The families became the experts because some of the preservice teachers did not know the rhymes, but most of the parents did. For the tutors, many of these songs were unfamiliar, as one tutor, born in Mexico, wrote in reflection,

> Para nosotros maestros criados aquí en los Estados Unidos, fue una lección en el aprendizaje de canciones de niños en español. Para mí fue un recuerdo de melodías ya olvidadas. (*For those of us born in the United States it was a lesson in children's songs in Spanish. For me, it was a remembrance of forgotten melodies.*)

The ability of the parents to demonstrate their expertise and knowledge of songs and fingerplays in Spanish allowed them the opportunity to teach the songs to the tutors. This also left some tutors with the uncomfortable feeling that the parents were teaching them. Many commented on the emotion of seeing the parent taking control of the tutoring session for the first time and working confidently with their child.

Congruency in the Interpretation of Teacher Roles

Families and preservice teachers both commented on the role that teachers play in their culture. Teachers are held in great respect, but at the same time have great responsibility. The preservice teachers saw themselves as needing to have the knowledge and wisdom to give the families advice (*consejos*). As one preservice teacher wrote,

> La maestra necesita poseer gran sabiduria en todas las áreas de contenido que enseña para poder explicar al padre en lenguaje cotidiana lo que el niño esta aprendiendo. (*The teacher needs to possess great knowledge/ wisdom in all content areas so that she can explain to the parent in everyday language what the child is learning.*)

The preservice teachers also mentioned their growing awareness of their responsibility as educators to make sure that they could live up to the expectations of the families and that they had to make an effort as great as the effort the families were making.

> Esto me pone muy nerviosa puesto que la mama de Mario ha puesto una gran responsabilidad en mis manos. Y que debo de hacer un gran esfuerzo para ayudar a Mario. (*This makes me nervous because Mario's mother has placed a great responsibility in my hands. I have to make a great effort to help Mario.*)

Families described good preservice teachers as ones who truly cared about the children:

> …es la maestra como le habla ella, como le explica, lo calmada, eso sí es muy buena con la niña. (*It is the way the teacher talks to her, how she explains to her, and the patience she has with her. The teacher is very good with my child.*)

The preservice teachers were aware of the role attributed to them by the families and indicated a desire to fulfill this role. The congruency between families and preservice teachers as to the role of the teacher enhanced family-teacher communication.

Importance of Language to Communication and Relationship Building

Language plays a critical role in building family-school relationships as well as in teaching. In many cases, preservice teachers became aware of how their bilingual ability was of great value when communicating with the families, as they were better able to put the families at ease and explain technical aspects of education. As one teacher wrote, "It (Spanish proficiency) impacted the parents because they felt less intimidated to approach us."

The preservice teachers who were highly proficient in Spanish felt that it was the duty of the teacher to be able to communicate effectively with the families. They placed the responsibility for effective communication on the teacher to explain materials, answer questions, and make the parent comfortable. As one highly Spanish-proficient tutor wrote,

> La maestra debe poseer una gran actitud social con los padres y dominar la lengua de ellos. La maestra debe dedicar tiempo a los padres y responder a todas sus dudas. Se necesita invitar al padre que se sienta confortable hablando con el maestro. Se necesita que el maestro le proporcione ideas al padre para ayudar a su hijo en casa. (*The teacher should be willing to be sociable with parents and know their language. The teacher should dedicate time to the parents and respond to their doubts. They should make the parent comfortable when speaking with the teacher. The teacher should have ideas for the parent to help their child at home.*)

In other cases, preservice teachers became aware of how they may need to improve their ability to communicate with families or how their lack of Spanish proficiency interfered with their communication. As one teacher wrote, "Many of the students have parents that speak Spanish, and I feel that language is something I should be fluent in to communicate with them well."

The preservice teachers who were not fluent in Spanish had to work to overcome barriers to communication; some worked to improve their Spanish, while others relied on more fluent peers and in some cases used the children (who were somewhat fluent in English) to help communicate with the parents.

> I really had a difficult time with this (communicating with the parent). Rosa isn't a fluent English speaker, but she is enough where we can understand each other. On the other hand, Rosa's mother only speaks Spanish.

> I'm very uncomfortable with my Spanish. I only told the mother hello. I couldn't think of anything else. I feel awful. I wish I were more confident with my language abilities. Maybe I can ask Rosa to let her mother be aware of the activities we are doing.

The families, too, saw the critical role that language plays in society. They wanted their children to become biliterate, maintaining their Spanish and their culture while learning English. One parent reported reading with her child in Spanish at home to maintain the language and culture.

> Por que es este…su cultura, es primero lo que va a aprender, el español, para que no lo pierda la cultura que uno le enseña. (*Because it is...their culture...it is the first thing they are going to learn, the Spanish language, so they do not lose it, the culture we teach to them.*)

In fact, some of the Spanish-dominant family members were learning English as well. As one family member mentioned, "Por que en casa, la mía es puro español y pues bueno sí es bueno que aprendan otro idioma, es el que le va a abrir más puertas, ¿verdad?" (*Because at home, in my home, we speak just Spanish and so then it is good for them to learn a second language because it is going to open doors in the future, right?*)

The role of language supports the literature that identifies the need for schools to connect with families in a language that families understand so that they are included in the school process. Families and teachers saw language as critical in enhancing the sharing of information.

Discussion

The findings support previous research that preservice teachers who have experiences with family involvement during teacher preparation will feel more comfortable interacting with families and value family involvement more than those that lack this preparation (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Katz, 1999; Morris & Taylor, 1998). The conversation starters or prompts encouraged two-way communication between preservice teachers and families, which previous research indicates is important to building family involvement, especially with Latino families (Feuerstein, 2000; Gaitan, 2004).

The two-way communication and experiences when the families were the experts, such as the sharing of Spanish rhymes and songs, helped preservice teachers understand how the families viewed their roles and the roles of teachers (Broussard, 2003; Keyes, 2002; McCarthy, 2000). After building relationships with the families, the preservice teachers also were less likely to view the families from a deficit perspective, as is sometimes the case with minority families (Peña, 2000; Valdés, 1996; Valencia, 1997).

This research differed from previous research in that it explored mostly Latino/a preservice teachers working with mostly Latino/a families. Making the families comfortable required an effort to address language and cultural issues (Trueba, 1998). Replication of this program is possible, given an effort is made to create an environment which is comfortable for the families. Of the studied preservice teachers, the majority were at least somewhat proficient in both English and Spanish and were able to communicate effectively with the families. In addition, our preservice teachers were familiar with the cultural backgrounds of the parents and thus were able to recognize the families' efforts and signs of respect and pride in their children. The tutors were able to make the parents comfortable and developed strong attachments to the families and their children. The demonstration of care by the tutors toward the children also helped develop a relationship based on shared responsibility for the education of the child. The shared language and culture of the parents and tutors allowed them to go beyond the typical displays of culture, like food and festivals, and into a genuine understanding of the motivations of the tutors and families.

In many cases the type of environment we created would be difficult to replicate, for example, in schools that primarily have monolingual teachers or have multiple languages used by the school's families. However, even in such cases, some lessons from our program could still be useful. One potential lesson from our program is that learning more about the culture and language of participants and including those elements in the program can make family members feel welcome. Translators from the community can be recruited to help with communication between the family members and teachers. Also, demonstration of caring by the program participants is important in making families feel welcome, whatever their language background.

In addition, some aspects of the program have value beyond this unusual setting. The structured experiences and reflections helped preservice teachers consider or reconsider their views of parents and families. Although our preservice teachers had come from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the families, they also had differences in their previous experiences (Richardson, 1999). Some preservice teachers came from different socioeconomic backgrounds from the families; those born and raised in the United States had cultural differences from families recently arrived from Mexico; the educational background of the tutors also was frequently different from the education of the family members. Education in the U.S. generally means being educated in a "monocultural" environment which has worked to assimilate the graduates into a dominant, middle-class, Eurocentric viewpoint (Nieto, 2000).

In developing relationships in school there is the potential for conflict between the teachers and families over the evaluation of the child, expectations

for the family, and linguistic and cultural differences (Chamberlain, 2005). As the relationship between the tutors and parents was not a power relationship, it was possible for each one to support the other. In addition, the reflective elements of the educational process allowed the preservice teachers to explore their feelings about their experiences of working with the families. They were also able to review their own backgrounds, culture, and language and consider how this might impact their involvement with families (Graue, 2005).

The program gave preservice teachers an opportunity to interact in a positive environment with families. Preservice teachers who do not have experience with families in their training report feelings of discomfort about communicating with parents (Rasinski, 2001). Research reports that perhaps the most important lesson in building effective home-school relationships is that teachers have much to learn from the child's first teachers – the parents (McCarthy, 2000). Our program gave preservice teachers such an opportunity.

Significance

The research reported here extends the current literature by exploring Latino preservice teachers working with Latino families, by describing a tutoring program in which preservice teachers and families interact regularly, and by considering the impact of conversation starters on communication among participants. Future studies could be conducted to look at the effect of similar tutoring programs and conversation starters with preservice teachers and families of different backgrounds. Research also might be conducted into the use of conversation starters with teachers in service who may lack the necessary preparation to feel confident in communicating with families.

Structured opportunities such as our tutoring program allow preservice teachers to explore the cultural and language factors related to communication and the development of relationships with families. Such experiences allow preservice teachers to view diverse family cultures from a strength perspective. Viewing diversity from a strength perspective allows for preservice teachers to move away from the deficit thinking toward families that exists in many of today's schools. Given the changing demographics of U.S. schools, models are needed that prepare teachers to collaborate effectively with diverse families.

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John A. Sutterby is an assistant professor at the University of Texas – Brownsville. He has published in the areas of early childhood, bilingual education, and family involvement. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John A. Sutterby, 80 Fort Brown, Brownsville, TX, 78520.

Renée Rubin is an assistant professor at the University of Texas – Brownsville. She has published in the areas of reading and writing with ESL students and family involvement with Latino parents.

Michelle Abrego is an assistant professor in educational administration at the University of Texas – Brownsville. Her research interests include family involvement and teacher and principal preparation.

The Development of a Learning Community Through a University-School District Partnership

Maria Madalena Ferreira

Abstract

This paper describes a program sponsored by the National Science Foundation in which graduate and advanced undergraduate students from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines partnered with local science and mathematics middle school teachers in a large, urban school district serving mostly low-income minority children. Results from the evaluation of the program indicate that the program was successful in providing learning opportunities for the participating students not usually available to them. More importantly, the various components of the program contributed to the development of a learning community in which the various stakeholders, regardless of their role in the program, became enriched through their shared experiences.

Key Words: learning community, school-university partnerships, graduate fellows, equity, science, mathematics, middle school students

Introduction

> My first day I had a beautiful lesson planned, but I was shocked because the kids were loud, they were running around and weren't paying attention. I was like "Oh my!" But now I'll come in with supplies and they will run up to me and help me and ask, "What are we going to learn today? What are we going to learn today?"

What made middle school youths change from a disruptive, disinterested attitude to wanting to know what they will be learning in a particular day? It was a radical change in the way they were learning mathematics and science, the result of a university-school district partnership supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The program known as the GK-12 Fellowship Program provides fellowships to highly qualified graduate and advanced undergraduate students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines to serve as STEM resources to teachers and students in K-12 schools (NSF, 2000). The program resulted from NSF's realization that investment in the education of the next generation of scientists and engineers must begin in K-12 schools (Thompson, Collins, Metzgar, Joeston, & Shepardson, 2002).

Traditionally, scientists have been removed from the realities of students in K-12 schools, leading to little or no understanding of K-12 education in the scientific community (Luedeman, Leonard, Horton, & Wagner, 2003) and a dwindling interest on the part of youngsters about science and mathematics. Thus, the primary goal of NSF's GK-12 program is to help future scientists become familiar with science and mathematics education in K-12 schools. NSF anticipates that in the future, these scientists will continue their interest and involvement in the nation's K-12 educational enterprise.

This paper describes a NSF supported GK-12 program that involved the school district and university in a large urban area in the Midwest. The facilitators of the program were graduate and advanced undergraduate students in science, mathematics, and engineering majors at the participating university.

Review of the Literature

Why aren't youngsters interested in science? Researchers primarily fault the methods used in many schools to teach science, which tend to focus on lecture and memorization of facts, thus disconnecting science from the realities of most students (Lee & Songer, 2003; Lipson & Tobias, 1991; Seymour & Hewitt, 1994). Yet, reform efforts have consistently stressed the importance of teaching science through inquiry (American Association for the Advancement of Science [AAAS], 1989, 1993, 1998; National Research Council [NRC], 1996, 2000). Furthermore, these documents have called for "science for all Americans" and the need of developing a scientifically literate society (AAAS, 1989, 1993; NRC, 1996). According to the National Science Education Standards, "scientific literacy implies that a person can identify scientific issues underlying national and local decisions and express positions that are scientifically and technologically informed" (NRC, 1996, p. 23).

Current teaching strategies in most urban schools serving primarily low-income, minority children are not geared to developing the high levels of conceptual understanding, scientific and mathematical reasoning, problem solving, and communication skills needed in an increasingly global and technologically based economy. Yet, the changing demographics of the U.S. population suggest that under-represented minorities will constitute a growing population from which a highly skilled workforce will be drawn (Clark, 1999). Thus, if our country is to continue as the world's economic and technological leader, we must do a better job of educating all children, regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

One of the main reasons for urban students' lack of quality experiences in science and mathematics is their limited access to qualified teachers (Hardy, 1998; NSF, 1996). Schools in many urban areas have a high proportion of students in poverty, are located in old buildings, have few resources, and often have difficulty recruiting and retaining the most qualified teachers (Tobin, Roth, & Zimmerman, 2001; Tobin, Seiler, & Walls, 1999). Yet, urban areas also have many resources in the community that could potentially impact the education of local children positively (Mincemoyer, 2002; Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001). For example, in a study conducted by Allen and Chavkin (2004), the involvement of community volunteers as tutors led to an increase in student achievement in areas of the curriculum including science and mathematics. In another study, Sheldon and Epstein (2004) found that connecting chronically absent youth with community mentors "measurably reduced students' chronic absenteeism from one year to the next" (p. 39). Others have found that community involvement can increase students' attitudes towards science and mathematics (Ferreira, 2001), as well as self-esteem, life skills, and attendance (Carpenter-Aeby & Aeby, 2001).

Some researchers contend that the involvement of the community in schools should eventually lead to transforming schools into learning communities (Harada, Lum, & Souza, 2003; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Ludick, 2003; Shelby & Kent, 2003). According to Hiatt-Michael, "a learning community is one in which all members acquire new ideas and accept responsibility for making the organization work" (p. 113). In learning communities, the various stakeholders share in the learning process and work together toward a common goal (Harada et al.; Kong & Pearson, 2003). In schools or classrooms implementing the concept of a learning community, students gradually take responsibility for their own learning, shifting that responsibility from the teachers to themselves (Harada et al.; Hiatt-Michael; Kong & Pearson).

In the program described here, a learning community was formed when graduate and advanced undergraduate students from science, mathematics,

and engineering collaborated with middle school teachers and their students in the implementation of science and mathematics activities using resources not usually available to them.

The GK-12 Fellowship Program

Program Partners

The partners in this program included a large school district and a research university located in a large urban area in the Midwest. The school district had a K-12 enrollment of 146,189 students in 184 elementary schools, 37 middle schools, and 43 high schools in 2003. The student population was 90.7% African American, and 68.7% economically disadvantaged (Standard & Poor's, 2003). Students in the district consistently scored well below the state average on statewide, standardized tests. As with many other large urban school districts, this one had difficulty recruiting and retaining highly qualified mathematics and science teachers.

The partnering university was a research institution located in the cultural center of the city. In 2004, the university had 12 schools and colleges offering more than 350 major subject areas with a yearly student enrollment of approximately 33,000, most of them commuting from the surrounding area. The student body was racially and ethnically diverse; many students were the first generation in their family to attend college. In addition to the traditional-age student, the university enrolled a large number of older students who had full-time jobs and were raising families while working on their degrees.

In response to the 1999 NSF request for proposals to the GK-12 program, school district administrators responsible for mathematics and science curricula and faculty from the university's colleges of science and education met to decide on the best approach to the program. There was general agreement that the program was best suited for middle school students (grades 6-8) due to its potential of impacting their attitudes toward mathematics and science and their future careers goals in these areas. NSF funded the program for a three-year period (1999-2002) and renewed it for an additional three years (2002-2005).

Program Goals

The overall goal of the GK-12 program described here was to improve the quality of science and mathematics teaching and learning in the targeted middle schools. More specifically, the program had the following objectives:

- Enrich and enhance learning for middle school science and mathematics students

- Enrich and strengthen the content expertise of the science and mathematics teacher partners
- Support cooperative teaching between middle school teachers and student fellows
- Strengthen the university and district collaborative relationships

The program components described in the following section were used to achieve these objectives.

Program Components

Student Fellows

Each year 15 student fellows (graduate and advanced undergraduate students from science, mathematics, and engineering fields) participated in the program. In the earlier program (1999-2002), the student fellows were distributed throughout a large number of middle schools across the district, with one or two student fellows per school. The following program (2002-2005) focused on only two middle schools (grades 6, 7, & 8) so that every science and mathematics classroom had one or two fellows working in close collaboration with a partnering teacher. The program administrators felt that focusing on fewer schools would increase the impact of the project and improve coordination of activities. The schools were selected by the district based on their mathematics and science needs and on principal and teacher interest and commitment to the program.

The student fellows were required to spend 10 hours per week in the classroom with their teacher partner as part of their fellowships. For most fellows, this meant two days per week in the classroom. In addition, most fellows spent approximately 10 hours per week planning and preparing for their classroom work.

During the summer prior to beginning their work in the schools, the student fellows participated in one week-long series of workshops to gain knowledge and skills important to working with middle school teachers and students. Workshop topics included, among others, "Cognitive and Conceptual Development in Children and Adolescents," "Diversity in the Classroom," "Relationship Building and Classroom Management," "Constructivism in Education," "Using the Learning Cycle to Teach Science and Mathematics," "Teaching Math in Grades 6-8," "Teaching Problem Solving in the Middle Grades," "Defining Cultural Competence," and "Technology in the Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics." During the school year, the fellows also met with the Principal Investigator on alternate weeks in a seminar setting to share success stories and discuss any issues related to their work with partner teachers and their students.

Professional Development of Participating Teachers

The program also included professional development opportunities in science and mathematics content and pedagogy for participating teachers in the form of a series of workshops, each three hours long. The workshops took place throughout the school year and were conducted by university scientists and education faculty. Workshop topics included, among others, "Fossils and Geologic Time," "Implementing Connected Math," "Genetics and Heredity," "Environmental Science," "Chemistry in the Middle School," "Simple Machines," and "Calculator Use in Mathematics." Teachers received stipends for their participation in the workshops.

Science/Math Summer Camps

The GK-12 Program also included a four-day science/math camp every summer for students from participating schools. The summer camps, planned and facilitated by the student fellows, were conducted in the labs at the university, with one field day at an area park in the metro area. Summer camps covered topics in physical, earth, and life sciences, mathematics, and computers, and included activities such as "Kinex Roller Coaster Physics," "Lego Robotics," "Bats," "Forensics," and "Computer Kaleidoscopes."

Science/Math Resource Collection

To facilitate the teaching of science and mathematics through inquiry, the university also maintained a "library" of resource materials, equipment, and supplies that could be accessed by the fellows for use in the classroom. This included everything from science kits and laptop computers to chemicals and test tubes to mathematics manipulatives and calculators. These materials were intended to supplement and enhance existing school and district materials and increase the amount of hands-on inquiry-based learning in the classroom. Many of the items in the resource collection were not normally available to teachers in the participating schools. As fellows and partner teachers planned lessons, both were aware of what was available to support classroom activities and fellows "checked out" the materials as needed. According to the fellows, they made considerable use of the materials over the school year. Most of the fellows reported using several resources each semester.

Math fellows reported using Pasco probes, graphing calculators, GeoBoards, measuring tools, fraction bars, fraction games, Skittles candies, Gonimeters (angle rulers), Tangrams, stop watches, geometry manipulatives, unit cube blocks, density kits, graduated cylinders, electric balances, math activity books, chalkboard-sized graph paper, transparency charts and graphs, and dry erase boards. Science fellows reported using microscopes and magnifying lenses, dissection kits, water testing kits, pondlife kits, animal kingdom specimen

samples, owl pellets, ear and other human body part models, genetics pedigree board, CBL probes, laptop computers, Pasco probes, an LCD projector, optical equipment, pulleys and levers, tuning forks, flashlights, digital scales, topographic maps, Newton springs, Newton cars, air tracks, light boxes, water prisms, mass blocks, glass and steel marbles, magnet kits, electric circuit boards and circuit materials, water bottle rocket launchers, planet models, a Van de Graff generator, rock collections, simple machine kits, periodic tables, selected chemicals (such as CaCl), stop watches, meter sticks, dry ice accessories, beakers, and other glassware.

Program Evaluation

Qualitative methodologies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to evaluate the program. The qualitative data were obtained from site visits and observations of full lessons as well as interviews with the fellows and partner teachers. Focus group interviews with teachers were also conducted after a regularly scheduled workshop training session, while fellows' focus group interviews were conducted after a regularly scheduled bi-weekly meeting. These approaches allowed program evaluators to "consider experiences from the informants' perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 32).

The evaluation of the program also included quantitative approaches in the form of a quasi-experimental design including an experimental and a control group (Anderson, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2005). The experimental group included mathematics and science teachers who participated in the GK-12 program, whereas the control group included mathematics and science teachers from designated GK-12 control schools. Teachers in both control and experimental groups were surveyed at the beginning and end of each academic school year. The survey questionnaire was designed to obtain teachers' perceptions about their classroom practices and confidence level with their respective subject area.

Data Analysis

Due to the small number of participating teachers, only descriptive statistics were used to examine differences in teacher survey responses between the teachers in the experimental and control groups. Analysis of the qualitative data involved techniques of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As data were read several times, individual segments of data were coded and similar codes grouped together into broader themes.

Results

Impact of the Program on Middle School Students

Although efforts were made to obtain student achievement data on state standardized test scores, we were unable to obtain disaggregated data so that comparisons between students in the experimental and control group could be made. As a result, the program's impact on the participating students was primarily based on comments from the teachers and student fellows.

Fellows' Perspectives

When the student fellows were asked to describe ways in which they contributed to learning in the classroom, they reported that they engaged the students' interest and participation with interesting facts and "fun" activities and served as the "expert," answering general math or science questions. As pointed out by one of them, "I try to introduce some mysterious facts in my lessons…the students are instantly interested." Fellows provided real world examples for lessons and identified for students how the information would be called for later in schooling or work. Several fellows reported their expertise in the content allowed them to break concepts down, link them together, or put them into a bigger context. As pointed out by one, "I can easily make connections between different concepts in science by drawing on my educational background. I am also able to break down more complex concepts into smaller units." Another fellow responded,

> The *Connected Math* program focuses on real-world applications of math. I can tell the students ways that the math that they are using is applied to science. Also, I can help students look at some of the math problems from a different perspective than the teacher.

Several fellows reported their most rewarding experiences were associated with teaching a lesson or explaining a concept to students, and having them understand the ideas. One said, "The most rewarding aspect of being in the classroom is the result of a student understanding the day's material…the smile and enthusiasm of the student after they scream, 'Ohhhhhh, I get it!'" Fellows cited moments when they saw productive learning going on, with all of the students engaged in an activity, working together, finding their own answers, and giving explanations to each other. Rewarding moments included seeing the students express enthusiasm about the things they were learning or the activities the fellows brought to the classroom. The following vignette from a science fellow who facilitated a lesson using microscopes illustrates this well:

> Students were using microscopes and were grossed out and awed by what they saw. One student asked what the specimen was. I told him and

> explained how I made that determination. Another student asked what it was. The first student responded with confidence. I helped a student feel like he was knowledgeable enough to transmit his knowledge.

Similarly, a math fellow shared the following story related to the changes he witnessed in a student:

> There was one kid who was just big trouble. He used to do nothing all day but throw things and spitballs. Now, he is excited about math, he will ask me for math riddles, math problems, anything. He will take riddles home and bring them back and ask if he got them right.

Another fellow added, "It's rewarding when I help students comprehend the material, knowing that with such a large class, my presence helped more students than would have been possible with just one teacher."

Fellows became involved in their students' extracurricular competitions and were rewarded by their students' success. One of the fellows had helped a team compete in the online E-Cybermission, and the team received an award. According to this fellow, "I was gratified because I scavenged parts and assembled the computers that the students used." Another fellow commented that he "was proud of the students' efforts on their science fair projects, despite some of them not receiving a blue ribbon."

Fellows provided a second perspective or approach to both teachers and students, sometimes offering explanations in a new way, thereby assisting struggling students. According to one of them, "I have used my math knowledge when we use the graphing calculators. I might show the students a short-cut or a trick in which they can obtain their data easier." Repeatedly, fellows commented on how they functioned as a second teacher, a second pair of hands, making it possible to conduct activities that could not be done with one teacher, providing increased one-on-one support to students, allowing the class to be split into groups for activities, and providing the teacher with a partner with whom to brainstorm and share ideas. They provided resources and materials for activities, on occasion contributed up-to-date content and teaching information to teachers, and, in some cases, assisted teachers with specific skills, such as using the *Connected Math* program, graphing calculators, and computers.

Teachers' Perspectives

The teachers, too, were aware of the contributions that the fellows made in their classrooms and often described "their" fellows as "awesome." The fellows brought in hands-on activities and the materials and equipment needed to carry them out. As "extra hands" the fellows also provide individual attention to students who might otherwise fall between the cracks. As one of the teachers pointed out, "You can't do it by yourself, with 36 students. I tried it, but

I couldn't meet all of their needs." The extra help was particularly important when trying to do "hands-on" activities, as pointed out by one of the teachers: "There are some activities I wouldn't think of doing because I can't monitor the students' safety." The use of hands-on activities, in turn, led to changes in student behavior. According to one of the teachers, "With the frog dissection, I couldn't do it by myself, but with the help of the fellows, you could have heard a pin dropped in that room." Another teacher added,

> Both of them [fellows] are very knowledgeable. They are up-to-date on current events. One of my fellows is a bio major and the other one a geology major. Between the two of them they both know so much that they are interrupting each other while they are teaching. They work really well with my students. The kids will come in and they are noisy and it takes a minute to settle down, but this one fellow will start teaching and the kids just sit down and start listening. It's like they don't want to miss out on anything. They know it's going to be an exciting learning experience for them. They are going to do activities; they will be working in groups.

However, according to the teachers, one of the greatest impacts of the fellows was as role models to youngsters who might never have considered attending college. One of the teachers reported, "The fellows I have graduated from the district and then went on to college. So they are role models for the kids." Another teacher made a similar comment:

> One of my fellows is a graduate of [the district's schools], and she's not that far removed from the age of my students so she has a positive relationship with them. She talks to them about high school and what it's like to go to college. It's a real positive personal relationship, like a mentor.

The fellows also affected individual students, as pointed out by one of the teachers:

> One of the students that my fellow has been working with is now starting to talk about college. This student will ask me what kind of degree does the fellow have and how do you get into all of this. So it has really been positive.

Impact of the Program on Participating Teachers

The impact of the program on the participating teachers was the result of a variety of interventions that were part of the program. Teachers attended workshops intended to foster their content and pedagogical knowledge. They collaborated with one or two fellows in the development and delivery of science

and mathematics lessons and had access to resources that would not be available otherwise.

Workshops

According to the teachers, the workshops contributed to their content and pedagogical knowledge. As a math teacher pointed out, "I find the techniques helpful to myself, especially as a new teacher. I just went to the classroom not knowing, so these are different things that you can do." Another one illustrated how a math workshop helped her understand a concept in mathematics, which in turn led to better student understanding:

> For 7th and 8th grade there is no lesson on fractions, you just somehow fit it in. After attending Dr. X's workshop I now have an 80% success rate with fractions, whereas last year, it might have been 5%. Now my students are so proud when they put their little "1s" and I'm so proud of them, too.

Other teachers pointed out that in the workshops, "You learn new ways to teach the same concepts. For my students, the way Dr. X taught us how to simplify fractions has helped my students build on their multiplication skills." Another one added, "A lot of the textbooks make it very hard, but he broke it down to the most simplest form. It couldn't be any simpler than this. You could teach it to a 1st grader or a 12th grader, it is still the same."

Science teachers were of the same opinion. While discussing the workshop she had attended that day, one of the science teachers remarked, "I can use the materials from today's session not only with geology, but to integrate chemistry and other disciplines we have covered." Another one added, "The last two workshops have been very helpful and applicable. The genetics material is right up our alley. I look forward to using it." Still another one remarked:

> I like the topic selections. Like from today's workshops I got a wealth of information for activities that could carry me for the rest of the school year. And I can pick and choose what's most appropriate for the students I'm working with at their grade level.

Another science teacher commented on the usefulness of the workshops to standardized tests. According to this teacher, "They provided good information on weather, and weather is covered in all three tests."

Science/Math Resources

Teachers were thankful to have access to materials and equipment usually not available to them. As one of them pointed out, "I wouldn't have the materials if they didn't bring them in. Anything I get for my classroom, I have to pay for. There is simply no budget." Another teacher described how the

equipment that the fellows brought facilitated students understanding of natural phenomena:

> The team brought in some of the equipment for the tornado as a demonstration. We normally wouldn't have a big fire in the middle of the room [laughter]. That makes a difference when they can bring in special equipment for experiments.

Another teacher added:

> The materials that come along with the fellows, that alone is a big help. Like the rest of the teachers, we have nothing; I shouldn't say nothing, but very little. So just to have the GK-12 fellows come in with all of those materials is just fantastic.

Survey Results

Results from the survey used to examine the impact of the program on the participating teachers' pedagogical approaches uncovered some important differences in the experimental and control group's responses. The differences centered around three main areas:

1. The teachers in the experimental group reported using more pedagogical approaches related to science processes – experiments, demonstrations, collecting and analyzing data, problem solving, the importance of replication, and controlling variables.
2. The teachers in the experimental group reported using more technology in their classrooms.
3. The teachers in the experimental group reported using the textbook, and the order of topics in the textbook, less frequently than did the control group.

The math teachers in the experimental group also reported using more manipulatives, demonstrations, and creative ways to help their students understand the content in mathematics. Furthermore, the teachers in the experimental group reported involving their students in problem solving activities more often than did the teachers in the control group.

The program also impacted teachers' self-confidence and classroom practices as indicated by the following teacher comments:

> "I'm more confident about using the connected math."
>
> "I now do a lot more cooperative activities."
>
> "I try to give a lot more feedback, like in different ways, not just use a test."
>
> "I've learned to be a little more sensitive to the needs of my students. By watching the interactions of the fellows with my students, I now can better understand how the students are learning."

Impact of the Program on Student Fellows

Fellows reported they learned about classroom management and the daily activities of addressing discipline, homework, attendance, and tardiness. They gained experience in teaching, problem solving, working in an environment with diverse people, working with children with many different needs, and communicating with youth and adults. Some reported they strengthened their content knowledge, learned different approaches to teaching, improved their management and leadership skills, learned to be team players, and/or learned to clarify and organize their thinking. Several noted the program gave them the opportunity to experience well-run classrooms where they could try new activities and "practice" with the guidance of an experienced teacher.

However, one of the greatest impacts of the program was on the number of fellows who decided to become teachers. So far, over one-third of the fellows have switched into education. As one of the math fellows pointed out, "I have more incentive to want to become a teacher than to be an engineer." According to several fellows, the children played a key role in their consideration of becoming teachers. As remarked by a science fellow, "The kids have shown me that it's worth it all." Another science fellow described the children's' influence in the following manner:

> I went from pre-med to wanting to become a teacher. A lot of it has to do with the kids' feedback. Kids will come up to me and ask "Are you going to be a teacher?" and I'll say, "No, I'm going to be a doctor." They kept asking me, and one of the teachers I worked with sat down with me during her prep hour, and we really talked about it—like the benefits of becoming a teacher. She said that I may not get to all the kids I want to get [to], but as long you get to some, you have an impact, then it is worth everything in the world.

Another fellow made a similar comment:

> My involvement in the program convinced me to be a teacher. Actually, the kids convinced me because I had so many kids coming up to me saying, "Oh you explain this so much better than our teacher," and this and that.

Another fellow added:

> I have also thought about becoming a teacher now. I really like working with kids. I like talking with the kids, like they will come during lunch; they will just come wandering in and ask for help and will talk about stuff.

The teachers were also glad that some of their fellows were considering education as a profession. According to one of them, "My fellow is switching to education, she's such a natural at it; she's so good."

Discussion and Conclusion

According to Horton and Konen (as cited in Mincemoyer, 2001), successful programs have the following components: a partnership with the community, important teaching materials and other resources, an introductory workshop for participating teachers and other partners, and celebration of student accomplishments. In the program described here, the partners included the local school district and university; the program made use of an extensive library of equipment and materials that facilitated the teaching of science and mathematics using inquiry-based approaches, and it also provided enrichment opportunities for fellows and teachers in the form of workshops. Participating students had access to in-depth content and hands-on/minds-on classroom experiences as well as extracurricular activities, including summer science/math camps. The program also included, every year, a full-day workshop termed "Team Building Day" during which teachers, fellows, and program administrators had the opportunity to meet each other, share their expectations, and negotiate their roles and responsibilities.

Results from the program evaluation indicate that the program had a significant impact on the teaching and learning of mathematics and science in the participating schools. Although the impact might not yet be manifested in a significant change in student scores in standardized tests, the qualitative data indicated that the impact was multifaceted, as evidenced in the changes that middle school students, teachers, and student fellows experienced as a result of the program.

The middle school students who participated in the program had access to scientists and mathematicians who shared with them how scientific knowledge is translated into real world applications. As fellows shared their interests and enthusiasm with their students and how they had learned these subjects, they helped the young people think in new ways about mathematics and science.

The middle school students were also exposed to university life through the science/math summer camps. For many of these children, this was their first exposure to university life, including experiencing science and mathematics with real scientists in their laboratories. As they sat in classrooms and ate in the university's food court, the university became part of their lived reality.

The program also contributed to participating teachers' content knowledge and increased their utilization of inquiry-based teaching practices. As a result,

students who were typically disengaged from the learning process were showing increased interest in and positive attitudes toward science and mathematics. For the fellows, the program increased their awareness of the issues and problems facing large urban schools, and for some fellows, this exposure inspired them to become teachers, thus increasing the pool of highly qualified science and math teachers in the area.

One of the basic characteristics of learning communities is that all the participants share in the learning process as teachers and learners (Harada et al., 2003; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Ludick, 2003; Shelby & Kent, 2003). In the program described here, all the stakeholders participated in the learning process and learned from each other. Although many of the university fellows might have felt initially that the learning would be one-way (from them to the teachers and middle school students), they quickly realized that they had limited understanding of early adolescents and of K-12 education. They had to negotiate their knowledge with the students, work on their communication skills, and be sensitive to the needs of youngsters whose backgrounds were different from theirs.

The teachers had to negotiate their classroom space with the fellows in order to develop "an open environment for collaborative decision-making" (Hiatt-Michael, 2001, p. 117). They also had to keep an open mind as they realized their content knowledge was not as current and/or in-depth as they previously believed. This required trust, respect, and open communication between the teachers and their student fellows (Dickens, 2000).

As the program progressed, a sense of community developed at different levels. At the individual level, a learning community developed in the individual classrooms, among the teachers who came together during workshops and team building days, among the fellows who attended workshops and other activities, and among the children who met each other during the summer camps. A larger community was also developed encompassing all the teachers, their students, student fellows, program administrators, and the scientists who facilitated the teacher workshops. Regardless of the level, the ultimate goal was the same: to help low-income, minority middle school students discover the excitement of learning science and mathematics and catch a glimpse of a future full of possibilities.

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Maria M. Ferreira is an associate professor and head of the science education program at Wayne State University where she teaches graduate courses in science education. Her research focuses on the social contexts of education and how the culture of educational organizations facilitates or limits access to knowledge. She has examined the social contexts of education in two main areas: school culture within the construct of caring, and departmental culture as a reflection of the culture of science and its impact on gender equity in science and engineering. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Maria Madalena Ferreira, Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of Science Education, College of Education, Room 281, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, 48202.

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Parent-School Partnerships: Forked Roads to College Access

Susmita Sil

Abstract

This article utilizes a social capital perspective to explore the benefits and harmful effects of strong ties between parents and schools in enhancing college access for students. While focusing on social capital in the form of parental participation, the article goes beyond a functionalist approach of the social capital theory as adopted by Coleman, whereby the social networks within parent groups and between parents and teachers are viewed as providing common positive outcomes for everyone in the school. Instead, while acknowledging the inherent advantages of parent-school social networks, the article looks at social capital theory from a conflict framework wherein ends are not the same for everyone in the school body. This review thereby discusses how different groups of parents compete for power to define schools' functions. In the process, some powerful groups of parents enjoying strong social capital can lead schools to take actions that neither benefit the school as a whole, nor are they in the interest of children whose parents do not share the same social relationships. The review, therefore, argues for treating groups of parents differently instead of uniformly as one homogenous entity, based on their varying levels of social capital vis-à-vis schools.

Key Words: parental involvement, social networks, school transformation, college access, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status

Introduction

More and more children in the United States yearn for pursuing higher education in colleges, yet many are unable to realize their desires. A closer look at research data reveals that students of color and lower socioeconomic status are largely under-represented in the institutions of higher studies (Choy, 2001). This article explores and extends the possibility that an underlying reason for such disadvantages inheres in the patterns and quality of social relationships that the parents of these children have with their respective schools. The parental factor is now being recognized as one of the important factors determining students' access to college. Research has shown strong linkages between the participation (and its absence) of parents in schools, their children's scholastic performance, and the eventual probability of their access to college (Auerbach, 2002; Choy; McDonough, 1994, 1997).

This article utilizes a social capital perspective to first discuss how strong parental participation can lead to a reduction in the dropout rates of students and to enhancing their chances of making it to college (Coleman, 1988). However, while it is plausible to discern a strong positive link between parental participation and college access for children, there is a need to balance this optimistic conception with the possibility that a strong interference from parents can reduce the autonomy of schools, thereby acting as a liability for some other groups of children whose parents are not as influential. The present review discusses some cases where powerful groups of parents have played a role in resisting school reform processes to the extent of reducing the chances of college access for students from disadvantaged minority and socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, this article brings out a *dark side* of social capital that may emanate from strong parental participation in schools.

I argue for the need to go beyond the functionalist approach of the social capital theory adopted by Coleman, whereby the social networks within parent groups and between parents and teachers are viewed as a source of common positive outcomes for everyone in the school. As a contrasting perspective on the supposed advantages of parent-school social networks, I look at the social capital theory from a conflict framework wherein ends are not the same for everyone in the school body. I examine the role of social capital in facilitating selective transfer of information, acquisition and control of scarce resources in the form of college prep classes, and the selective coagulation of power to define and control the appropriate functions and outcomes of schools. In this paper, I engage a competing concept of social capital developed by Bourdieu (1985) whereby social capital is seen as a tool for reproduction of the dominant class. I explore how different groups of parents compete for power to define a

school's function. In the process, some powerful groups of parents who have strong networks with schools influence actions that are not necessarily in the interest of the school at large. This review, therefore, argues for treating groups of parents differently, instead of uniformly as one homogenous entity.

The arguments developed here are partially guided by the tradition of critical theory of looking at the unequal consequences of schooling and how it, though intending to educate all, can benefit certain groups of students to the detriment of others through various processes (Apple, 1986, 1995; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1971; Giroux, 1981, 1989, 1992).

A Social Capital Perspective on Parent-School Partnerships

Coleman's (1988) extensive study of the social structure of parental ties and their influence on the creation of human capital gives us insight into the ways social capital is formed and benefits the actors. Coleman defines social capital by its function, whereby individuals form social relationships that give them access to various resources that were previously not at their disposal. He emphasizes the deliberate process of building social networks through changes in relations among persons that benefits those who participate in the process.

Coleman identifies three forms of social capital. The first is based on obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of social structures where a benefit accrued by the first actor on the second builds up an obligation for the latter to return the favor to the former and simultaneously builds up a recurring expectation on the part of the first actor for the same. The success of this exchange is based on the trustworthiness of the social environment and the actual extent of obligations held, a higher level of obligation implying a greater amount of social capital. In a school environment, this kind of social capital can be observed within the organizations of parents where the parents have strong links with one another, forming a cohesive group, and also when parents and teachers share a high level trust that can benefit the school. Bryk and Schneider (2002) use Coleman's framework of social capital to draw our attention toward the social relationships at work in the school communities and how the nature of social exchanges between the principal, teachers, students, and parents can enhance the school's capacity to improve. Instead of affecting student learning directly, relational trust between the various stakeholders supports a set of conditions – some structural and some psychosocial – to make the environment more conducive to learning, ultimately leading to improved school productivity. Schools that have well-lubricated communication patterns between and among parental groups and teachers have higher relational trust, and this can act as social capital for the school (Bryk & Schneider).

The second form of social capital that Coleman (1988) identifies inheres in the information channels provided by a social network, that is, the use of social relations to access information that otherwise could be quite costly to access and share. Strong relationships between parents and school personnel can provide this kind of informational capital as they effectively share ideas about students that, in turn, can enhance their abilities to make decisions in the best interest of the students. By providing information to parents about the choice of curricula that their children should select, such social relationships can improve students' chances of future college access. These social ties can be of immense benefit, especially to those parents who have never been to college themselves and therefore lack the necessary information and expertise to aid their children in making effective curricular choices. Within the parental groups, members can share information about course offerings and the effectiveness of various teachers, thereby promoting college access for their children.

The third form of social capital inheres in the norms and effective sanctions adopted by members of a social network. Coleman (1988) emphasizes the use of some social norms, either internalized or rewarded, that can enhance certain actions. While acknowledging the importance of all types of social relations and social structures in facilitating social capital, Coleman identifies an important characteristic of social structure that facilitates social capital in the form of closure of social networks, or the level of interconnectedness of actors, which makes norms and sanctions effective. Coleman gives an example of intergenerational closure, wherein close ties between parents ensure effective monitoring of the children across several families. In addition, closure creates trustworthiness in the social structure (Coleman; Portes, 1998). One can therefore defend the effectiveness of this kind of social structure in cohesive parent groups that can benefit students. Applying the theory of social capital to schools, we can assume that stronger parental community participation can aid in human capital formation as intergenerational closure acts to maintain discipline and discourages deviant behavior among students, thus reducing dropout rates and improving the chances of college access, as Coleman's study on high schools reveals.

The Dark Side of Social Capital

While social relationships within parent groups and between parents and schools have ostensible advantages as discussed above, there are somewhat under-recognized but equally germane drawbacks that need to be considered for developing a coherent understanding of parental social capital. This section

builds on cases where strong community ties have, in fact, reduced the autonomy of schools to undertake reforms. One such case was provided by the study on detracking efforts of some schools by Oakes (1985) and Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow (1997). The practice of tracking in schools places students in various leveled tracks based on their merit. Oakes' study revealed major curricular differences across tracks. Students in the top tracks were being provided knowledge and skills that were highly valued in society and that would help them in seeking college or university admission, eventually giving them access to higher social and economic positions in the adult world. The difference in curricula also ensured that once placed in a lower track, a student would find it almost impossible to move to a higher track (Oakes, 1985). Subsequent efforts to remove the process of tracking in these schools were met with opposition from groups of powerful parents whose children were favored by the existing system of tracking. The socially powerful parents were motivated by their own self-interest in maintaining a system of meritocracy in which their children got the best deals in terms of quality of education and subsequent placement in higher social and economic positions in society (Oakes et al., 1997).

This case resonates closely with another study that looked at the negative effects of social capital (Portes, 1998), wherein members of a community enjoying the benefits of certain transactions, in this case better prospects for their children due to tracking mechanisms, excluded others from these benefits. Both these cases concur with Bourdieu's ideas of social capital in which social capital has a symbolic power that the dominant class invests in to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and to preserve the group's dominant position. Furthermore, to protect the group's social capital, access to its membership is closely monitored (Bourdieu, 1985). In the Oakes' et al. (1997) study, students from lower socioeconomic classes were increasingly being pushed into the lower track classes, and attempts by the school to include them within the mainstream curriculum by way of detracking were being subverted by the groups of powerful parents belonging to higher socioeconomic status groups. Oakes et al. observes that while one set of parents is quite vocal in making demands on the school, the opinions of parents of students who cannot make it to the higher tracks are hardly heard. Thus, one set of parents is rich in social capital by way of their cohesiveness and is dominant in making demands, whereas the other is impoverished.

Studies by Lareau (1987) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) on parental participation in schools provide interesting insights into the role played by social stratifications in parental participation and help us understand why some groups of parents are more vocal than others. Although these studies emphasize differences in cultural capital for different socioeconomic classes, one can discern a

parallel set of differences in the operation of the social capital of these various groups as well. In these studies, we see that even though the school teachers encouraged parental participation especially in reinforcing and monitoring the learning efforts of their children, participation by upper-middle-class parents was found to be higher both in terms of quality and quantity, whereas the working-class parents showed signs of discomfort in interacting with the same teachers. Furthermore, the working-class parents were also unfamiliar with the school's curriculum and the specific educational problems of their children. This difference in parents' participation could be attributed to differing educational capabilities and to differences in information about schooling. Most of the upper-middle-class parents had college degrees and considered themselves no less qualified than the teachers in handling the educational requirements of their children, even to the extent of criticizing and monitoring the teachers. Furthermore, they had more disposable income and flexible work schedules that constituted better material resources to have effective parent-school partnerships. On the other hand, most of the working-class parents were either high school graduates with no college experience or high school dropouts, and many had problems in school as children themselves. They had more faith in the teachers' abilities to guide their children, as they were not confident about their own abilities. Additionally, the upper-middle-class parents displayed strong intergenerational closure as these parents socialized a lot with other parents in the school community. As a result, they had extensive information about the classroom and school life of their children. Quite in contrast were the working-class parents who had close ties only with their own relatives in the area and almost no contact with other parents of the same school. Lareau's study clearly indicates the link between social class and parental participation. It also suggests that the kind of family-school relationship promoted by the schools currently benefits the richer families while devaluing the family-school relationships that the working class finds more comfortable.

Lareau and Horvat's (1999) case study of parental participation of Black parents in school activities shows a similar class-based effect whereby middle-class parents' cultural and social resources help the parents to comply with the dominant standards in school interaction, while types of parental participation that the teachers do not approve of are discouraged. Blacks, irrespective of social class, however, suffer from an additional lack of the valued cultural capital that Whites enjoy, resulting in better performance of White children in schools (Lareau & Horvat). These studies are in the tradition of Bourdieu, trying to explain unequal academic achievement and reproduction of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1985).

Another perspective is provided by Post's (1992) case study based in Joshua Gap, a small California town. Even though this study does not directly pertain to college access, it provides a good example of a situation where strong groups of parents have acted in unison to go against a school's policy. In this case the local school board's attempt to adopt a multicultural reading series was met with protests from a group of parents who demanded removal of the books. This community of parents sharing common interests felt that the series was against their perception of traditional family values and unpatriotic as the books were international in flavor. It was thus a concept of community constructed by some members who shared perceptions of what is right and what is wrong. On the other side of the conflict were the teachers and another set of parents who supported the introduction of the series. Both sets of parents, however, were from similar racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and were equally vocal in their demands. In this case, we observe how strong community ties may attempt to reduce the autonomy of the schools in the selection of curriculum, since the community did not perceive the change in the curriculum as appropriate. Parents may use their social capital to curb innovative efforts on the part of the school.

Post's (1992) case study is distinct and revealing compared with the earlier cases of detracking and class-based parental participation. In the detracking case reported by Oakes et al. (1997), one set of parents was more vocal than the others, while in the class-based parental participation studies done by Lareau (1987; Lareau & Horvat 1999), the upper-class parents were clearly in an advantageous situation as far as teachers' perceptions of parental participation were concerned. However, in Post's study, the two sets of parents with opposing views are equally vocal in their views. This is, in fact, an example of healthy parent-school partnerships; not only were all groups of parents equally active, but also their discordant voices were given equal importance by the school.

Illuminating the Dark Side of Social Capital: Setting an Informed Agenda for Schools

The studies discussed above bring forth certain contradictions to the traditional wisdom that strong parental social capital can lead to positive outcomes for all students. Coleman's theory provides a functionalist approach towards viewing the positive outcomes of social capital, inhering from strong parental links with the schools. When he defines social capital, one of his basic assumptions is that "social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). The various studies discussed in the previous sections raise doubts about this

basic assumption. There is no doubt that Coleman's ideas about social capital have certainly been seminal in the understanding of parent-school dynamics. This article, while acknowledging the positive outcomes of social capital, tries to extend Coleman's work by developing boundary conditions to his theory whereby outcomes of social capital may not be positive for all stakeholders.

The next section examines how schools can play a role in facilitating the acquisition and control of scarce resources, such as higher track classes that lead to college access, and in enhancing the power to define and control the appropriate outcomes or function of schools. In view of a conflict approach to the social capital aspect of parental participation in schools, whereby the ends that different groups of parents are trying to achieve through strong social networks are not necessarily the same, I posit that schools need to be careful about the differential outcomes and should therefore take measures to improve the chances of college access for students of lower socioeconomic status.

Schools and the Mitigation of Selective Information Sharing

The role of strong social networks in providing access to information was discussed in the first section. While some active parents, through strong ties with schools and intergenerational ties within parent groups, can benefit from information that can help their children gain access to colleges, other parents who do not possess such strong social capital can be at a disadvantage. Schools can, therefore, provide the underserved students with necessary information and tools essential for college access by creating and maintaining information channels between parents and teachers. In other words, schools can facilitate the formation of parental social capital especially for those groups that do not inherently enjoy the benefits of the dominant groups' cultural capital.

The Education Resources Institute (TERI) report (2004) found that students coming from disadvantaged racial and socioeconomic conditions are underserved by schools in the disbursal of college preparatory information and guidance. This report makes a strong case for providing extensive information to under-represented students and their families who may lack basic knowledge about the process necessary to gain access to college. According to this report, disbursal of the information should start as early as the child's 5th grade year and should include matching career interests with educational goals, describing the courses the students need for college admission, and explaining the availability of financial aid (Vargas, 2004). Unfortunately, the students who are most in need of such information are overly represented in schools where the student-to-guidance counselor ratio is very high, leaving very little time for the counselors to pay individual attention to these students. Whereas upper-middle-class and elite students under similar conditions can afford to

pay for counseling services offered at a price by private, independent educational consultants, thus managing their admission to good colleges, students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds have to rely more on their schools for similar services (Jun & Colyar, 2002; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Vargas). Such tendencies on the part of students coming from advantaged backgrounds can also increase competition for access to colleges, making it even more difficult for students who do not enjoy similar privileges.

Schools have the special responsibility of addressing the needs of disadvantaged students and families precisely because they lack social capital and also cannot buy expensive counseling services from outside. Because such students and families lack vital information about choice of curriculum and financial aid that might hamper their decision to enroll in college, schools ought to target these parents when disbursing information (MSEP, 2006). When parents know beforehand about the availability of financial aid and the residual expenses in colleges, they can start saving early on so that their children's educational aspirations do not suffer. Parents should also be provided with information about their children's progress and about academic course offerings so that from middle school on they can encourage their children to take the most challenging and useful courses to improve their chances of college access. Information must also be provided about college entrance examinations and navigating through the college admissions process. Disadvantaged students and their parents need to be encouraged to consider four-year colleges instead of just focusing on two-year colleges. To improve college access for these students, investments can be made to provide technological support to allow students to conduct college-related transactions over the internet (Epstein, 1992; Vargas, 2004).

Additionally, a major problem in college access for most students is the lack of connections between K-12 and post-secondary education systems. The sets of standards and coursework requirements are very different in the school system and the post-secondary education systems. As a result, many students and their parents do not know what is expected of students entering college, and these misunderstandings can, in turn, lead to poor preparation for college (Andrea, Kirst, & Antonio, 2004). In light of this finding, what is required is the building up of strong social networks between parents, schools, and post-secondary education systems. In such networks, schools will have to act as intermediaries between parents and colleges so that the students can benefit from such networks to improve their chances of college access.

Schools and the Equitable Disbursal of Scarce Resources

Resources such as college preparatory classes and upper track classes are scarce, and typically they are distributed on the basis of academic merits of

the student. In this context, it is useful to invoke again the emphasis on social norms by Coleman (1988) in his discussion of the benefits of social capital. Social norms are either internalized or rewarded to enhance certain actions. While Coleman sees the usefulness and effective maintenance of social norms in reducing deviant behavior among students, social norms adopted by members of a social network need not always be beneficial for everyone in society. One can perceive a dark side of social norms in the acceptance and maintenance of the traditional ideology of merit through strong social capital that can be detrimental to students who do not necessarily display the kind of merit that is rewarded in society. The current ideology of merit uses conventional measures of academic success in determining who should have access to further educational opportunities, thus justifying uneven distribution of curriculum and teaching quality (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002). Therefore, using Coleman's idea of social norms, one can argue that the traditional ideology of merit has been internalized by parents as well as teacher groups, and it is akin to a well set grammar of schooling that is maintained and rewarded by the members of strong social networks of parents and teachers. The definitions of intelligence and merit that are socially constructed by such networks are so ingrained in the mindset of their members that they are perceived as common sense and hence not to be questioned or doubted (Oakes et al., 2002). In the process, while students of mainstream culture and middle-class status benefit from the resulting merit-based tracking, students coming from a lower socioeconomic background, whose parents are often at the periphery or outside the parent-school social network, are increasingly being represented in lower track classes (Oakes et al., 1997).

Yonezawa and Oakes (1999) make a case for restructuring access to information whereby educators are made aware of how they should respond to parents from different backgrounds. Their study shows that fixed policies become negotiable when advantaged parents lobby for better placement of their children, while disadvantaged parents never come to know why their children are offered certain courses and what implications that might have on their children's chance of making it to college. While on one side schools need to be strict with their fixed policies that should be universally adopted for all students irrespective of their race and socioeconomic status, disadvantaged parents need to be provided with extra information about courses, as these parents are generally isolated from better informed parental networks. Schools ought to provide special attention to characteristics that impede information flow, such as immigrant status, language barriers, single parenthood, and working situations of parents that might reduce their frequency of parent-school interactions; scarce guidance time and resources should be allocated accordingly.

Furthermore, schools can create supplemental mechanisms, such as tutoring and back-up classes, to help students who perform poorly instead of leaving them further behind (Auerbach, 2002; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Yonezawa & Oakes).

Schools also need to acknowledge that parents who are not visible are not necessarily uninvolved. Rather, they motivate their children through their personal stories and other means (Auerbach, 2002). This aspect needs to be recognized, respected, and mobilized for the children's benefit. Such parents need to be reached, taken into confidence, and encouraged to participate by giving them honest information about school programs to reduce inequities. These initiatives can diminish parental skepticism and improve trust between parents and school authorities. At the same time, schools need to be vigilant about the ways in which some families are privileged. Sometimes upper-middle-class parents, in their zeal to "manage" the school careers of their children, may misuse their parental rights for hoarding the best classrooms and resources to the detriment of others. Instead, active and vocal parents should be encouraged to be advocates for all children, not just their own. Furthermore, students who do not have active parental advocates need to be heard and encouraged to speak up for themselves (Yonezawa & Oakes, 1999).

Schools and the Dispersion of Unequal Power

Different groups of parents and other interested members in the school community, such as teachers and community members, may not share the same set of interests or visualize the same desirable ends. Thus, while Coleman (1988) recognizes the common goal of building a trustworthy social environment in school that is conducive to better student performance, there may be other, potentially conflicting goals and outcomes of schooling demanded by different sets of stakeholders. In earlier sections of this article, this argument was quite evident in the differing goals of parent and teacher groups in the Joshua gap incident in California (Post, 1992) and the detracking incident reported by Oakes (1985). In these situations, social capital was used as a tool for leveraging power to define the school's function, thus bringing forth the conflict aspect of social capital. It is not always a common goal that every interested member in the school community is pursuing; at times, the function of the school is constrained and strong social networks come into play to silence the voices of certain groups while the actions of others prevail.

In light of these arguments, the concept of school productivity and function can be reconstructed to include reaching out to and fostering relationships with parents in various groups. Schools need to organize parent groups and listen to them, empowering them. A healthy school environment can be promoted

by encouraging the empowerment of teachers, as well, instead of a traditional bureaucratic hierarchical system. Teacher empowerment can either be in the form of teacher professionalism (i.e., teacher-as-expert role) or in the form of promoting collaborative decision making among a group of educators. Parental empowerment can develop by parents exercising influence within a school, usually through decision-making forums (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). Policies could be developed to encourage parents to be partners in a collaborative environment through shared decision-making, establishing effective communication between all parents and acknowledging their diversity and differing needs, establishing programs at schools to enable parents to participate actively in their children's education, and connecting students and families with community resources to provide an enriching experience in education (Bauch & Goldring; Chrispeels, 1991). Local schools can thus emerge as a powerful vehicle for bringing together community members for the benefit of all, and this ability to link parents can be viewed as a positive attribute of the school. Correspondingly, schools that effectively foster social ties in their communities may be rewarded by provision of more resources.

Bauch and Goldring (1998) have examined four models of parent-teacher participation. Under a traditional or hierarchical mode, both parental and teacher participation are low and power is organized hierarchically. The teacher professionalism mode is marked by high teacher and low parental participation. Teachers view their knowledge base as a source of power while parents' voices are barely heard. Under the parental empowerment mode, parents are more powerful compared to teachers in influencing school processes and outcomes, and they act as advocates, activists, and/or vocal members of elected school councils. The fourth model is a partnership or communal mode, indicating dual empowerment of teachers and parents working together to develop learning and caring communities in schools. The first three models are fraught with risks of promoting unequal relationships. Thus, whereas too much teacher empowerment can lead to very little decision-making by parents regarding the education of their own children, too much parental empowerment can lead to the hijacking of decision-making roles by a small group of dominant parents that might lead to detrimental results, not just for some students, but also for teachers. However, dual empowerment of both parents and teachers, though running the risk of the politics of power, has a better chance of benefiting from the politics of partnership stressing equity and caring relationships (Bauch & Goldring; Epstein, 1993).

Auerbach's (2002) study makes a case for bringing together parents coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and actively listening to them instead of silencing or muting their voices in educational research. She identifies three

types of narratives from these parents: life stories of parents' own struggle with schooling as students, stories of bureaucratic rebuff in encounters with school staff as parents, and their counter-stories that challenge the official narratives of schooling. Auerbach helped organize monthly bilingual Futures and Families meetings in a school where parents were actively engaged in the college access programs of their children. Providing a platform for the parents to come together and share their stories helped previously isolated parents to build social networks and a sense of commonality in addition to improving their bargaining power to negotiate conflicts with their school. Thus, while such actions can help in parental empowerment, they can also help educators and researchers understand and affirm the cultural capital of these parents. Unlike the established views that disadvantaged parents do not bother about participating in school activities, their ideas of participation are quite different and need to be understood in order to establish effective parent-school partnerships (Auerbach; Jun & Colyar, 2002).

Moving Toward a New Framework for Examining Parental Participation

The arguments presented above have important implications for society, as they imply that a set of parents, by way of their family-school relations and also by virtue of intergenerational ties, are more representative of the "community" that forms partnerships with schools in deciding what and how children should study. In other words, these parents decide the function of the school. Therefore, we are not talking about the entire community, but rather a clique of powerful parents whose social capital is highly valued in the system, much to the detriment of the under-represented social classes who, in most cases, are also the minority classes and races. Through densely interconnected networks, the powerful parental groups have, on the one hand, achieved enhanced social capital by helping and promoting the interests of their own children, and on the other, have created liabilities for other less privileged, under-represented parents by preventing the schools innovating and adopting broader and more equitable approaches to education for the benefit of all children.

As a result, instead of seeing "parents" as a single homogenous group whose participation is seen as desirable by schools, society needs to adopt a framework that examines how the intersections of multiple social relationships are constructed to produce equities or inequities (Knight & Oesterreich, 2002). As highlighted in the previous sections, policymakers also need to be aware of the intersections of parents' socioeconomic status, majority/minority status, language, and single-parent status. This is especially important because different

parent groups also represent different cultural and social capital; instead of being seen as deficiencies, their unique characteristics and backgrounds ought to be understood and incorporated as familial strengths in the models of parental participation in schools (Knight & Oesterreich).

At the level of the school, however, the task of empowering parents belonging to lower socioeconomic status and/or racial and ethnic minority groups is not an easy task, given the fact that teachers and administrators are subject to manipulation by powerful cohesive groups of privileged parents. Schools can start by making initiatives that would benefit the lower-class students without harming the upper-class students, such as disbursing information about various courses and college access. These actions need to specially target students and parents belonging to low socioeconomic status. An exemplary program working towards this end is the Math/Science Equity Program, a collaborative effort among parents, researchers, educators, and community activists. The program aims at reducing academic disparities between African American and White students in math and science course enrollments and at enhancing parental involvement by informing parents about their rights in public education, encouraging networking among parents within schools and communities, and highlighting the importance of higher level math and science courses for the future success of the students (MSEP, 2006).

Furthermore, schools can become more appreciative of the subtle and different ways parents participate, especially parents of lower socioeconomic status, instead of seeing them as being deficient in providing aspiration and help to their children. There are definite advantages in involving parents in school activities according to the social capital theory. In fact, according to Epstein (1992), there is increasing evidence that family and school partnership practices are more important for children's success than family structures, such as race, socioeconomic class, level of parent education, marital status, language of family, family size, or the age of the child. The more intense the school-family partnership, the less influence the above-mentioned factors have on children's academic success.

However, it is also important to realize that any parental body is not a homogenous group without a name or a face. Rather, parents from a variety of backgrounds need to be recognized, and their needs should be served. Often parents coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are lesser participants in school activities, leading to the general opinion that they are not interested or that they do not care about their children's success. Instead of blaming these parents and seeing deficits in their social capital, policymakers need to make policies that would strengthen the social networks of these underprivileged parents and make them equal partners in their children's success in education.

Educators need to be sensitive to the needs of these parents instead of seeing them as a burden. On the other hand, in light of scarce resources, schools need to be careful that such resources are not hijacked by better "connected" upper-middle-class parents to the detriment of other children in the schools.

The need to involve diverse parent groups is even more crucial in the present scenario of increased globalization. The United States and many other developed countries are becoming more multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial. The constructed community needs to represent and appreciate this variety as its strength; only then will the dark side of social capital be fully illuminated and schools and students be able to reap the benefits of greater parental and community participation in schools. Parent-school relationships indeed offer a forked road for policymakers and educators.

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Susmita Sil is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education Policy Studies in the College of Education at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research interests include social capital issues and school participation of parents belonging to different racial/ethnic and immigrant status groups. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Susmita Sil, 2387 E. Pearl Point, Apt #2, Fayetteville, AR, 72701.