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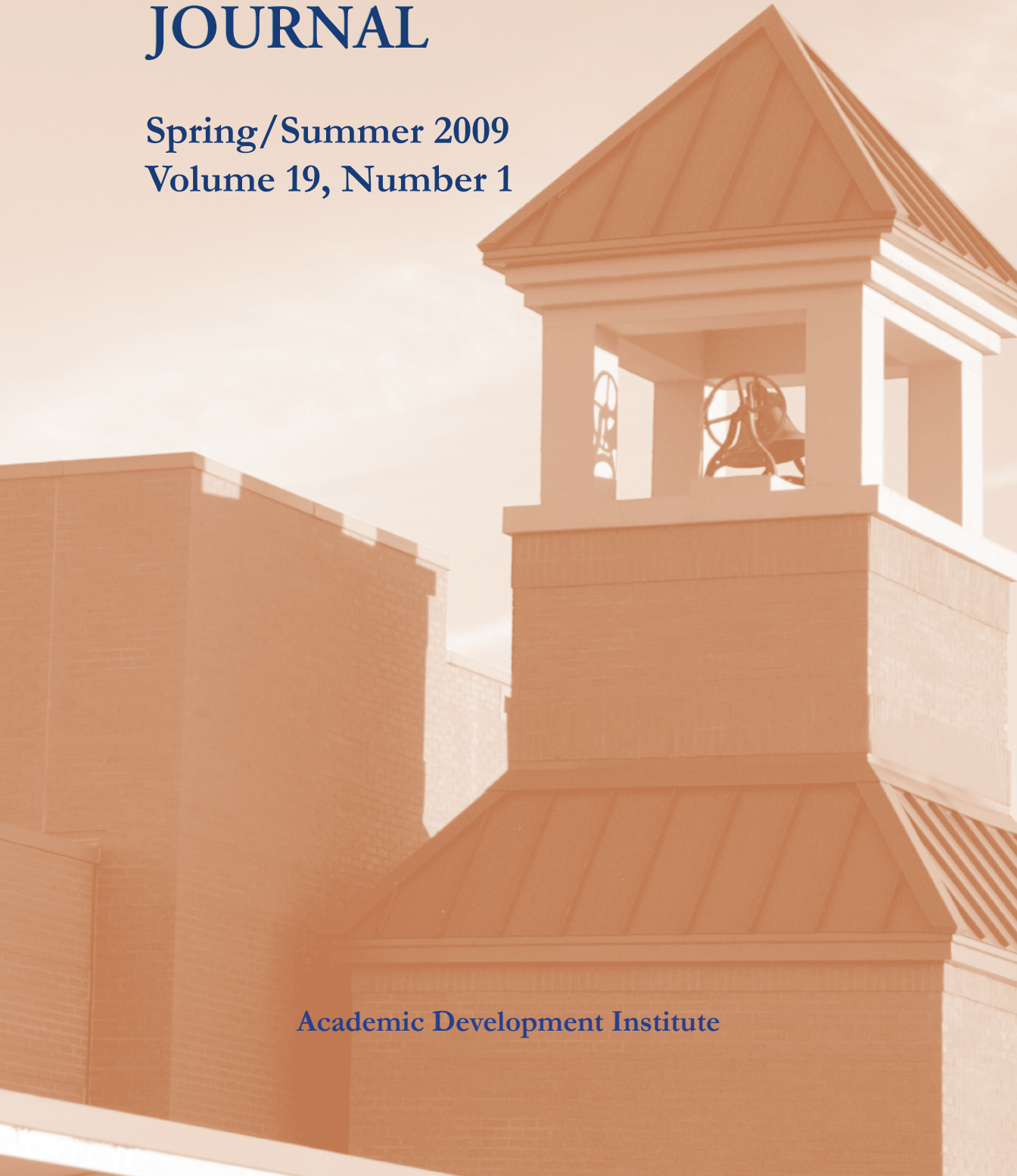

Academic Development Institute

The School Community Journal

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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.

Editorial Policy and Procedure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Editor's Comments

The articles in this Spring/Summer 2009 issue have some common threads and some diverse ones, as well. While several articles focus on school communities in urban settings, the intergenerational literacy program described by Doiron and Lees took place in Canada's smallest and largely rural province, Prince Edward Island. This is in contrast to Auerbach's cases of four innovative leaders in the huge Los Angeles Unified School District. Barnyak and McNelly also look at an urban district, but they use a survey to compare teachers' and administrators' beliefs about parent involvement with what these educators actually practice. Reed looks at the bridging role played by local teachers, that is, educators who actually live in or have roots in the neighborhood surrounding an urban elementary school. Tripses and Scroggs also look at an urban school, examining a successful school-church-community collaboration.

The potential for partnerships with faith-based institutions is touched on not only by Tripses and Scroggs, but also by Obeidat and Al-Hassan. One aspect of community involvement in Obeidat and Al-Hassan's study of award-winning teachers in the country of Jordan was service learning performed at local mosques. They also describe these top teachers' efforts to communicate with and involve parents in their children's education.

All levels of schooling are covered in this issue as well, from Chang, Park, and Kim's look at the effects of Early Head Start's classes for parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, to Johnson's study of an innovative high school. She found that unique approaches to adolescents' developmental needs can contribute to a caring, productive school climate.

Finally, we round the issue out with a book review by Weldon that may inspire a visit to your favorite bookstore – online or down the street – to get your own copy of *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Strategies for Educating Latino, Black, and Asian Students*. We hope you find all these articles helpful in our collective, ongoing pursuit to create thriving school communities!

Lori Thomas
June 2009

Walking the Walk: Portraits in Leadership for Family Engagement in Urban Schools

Susan Auerbach

Abstract

Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative. The commitment of school leaders is vital to school-community connections, yet is poorly documented in the literature and insufficiently addressed in training for administrators. Many school leaders "talk the talk" of school-family partnerships, but how exactly do they "walk the walk," given the competing pressures they face in a massive urban district like Los Angeles? This qualitative study offers contextualized portraits of four school leaders notable for their proactive, community-oriented approach. Data focus on the administrators' role in promoting activities, including an annual conference with elected officials, the Parents as Authors Program, community organizing-style "house meetings" in classrooms, and home visits. Findings suggest these leaders actively pursued family engagement as part of a broader moral commitment to social justice and educational equity for disenfranchised Latino families. Inspired by various family engagement models but distrustful of traditional parent involvement structures in the district, they shaped activities to the needs of their particular communities. Implications for leadership preparation programs are discussed, such as the need for more hands-on experience working with parents and apprenticeships with community-oriented school leaders.

Key Words: family engagement, school-family partnerships, parent involvement, empowerment, school leaders, social justice, leadership preparation, administrators, principals, urban schools, cases, portraits, educational equity

Introduction

Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative (Fruchter, 2007; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Noguera, 2001; Olivos, 2006). School-community partnerships – though typically invoked to increase achievement – are also critical to democratic schooling and civic capacity building (Goldring & Hausman, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). When urban schools pursue meaningful partnerships, they enhance social capital in struggling communities and expand opportunities for students, their families, and neighborhoods.

The commitment of school leaders is vital to school-community connections (Ferguson, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002), yet is poorly documented in the literature and insufficiently addressed in training for administrators. Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for school administrators, including collaborating with families and community members, mobilizing community resources, and responding to diverse community interests, have been adopted by most states and many leadership preparation programs. Yet only 20% of education college deans surveyed considered their administrative graduates well prepared to work with families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Both the parent involvement literature and the leadership literature call on administrators to set policy, allocate resources, and model practice to promote partnerships (Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sanders & Harvey) but offer few studies of this process in action with parents (Auerbach, 2007b; Griffith, 2001). Similarly, the leadership literature is full of exhortations to lead for social justice but offers few empirical reports on what this looks like in practice (Theoharis, 2007). The limited research on leadership and families suggests that though many administrators "talk the talk" of engaging parents as partners in education, they typically manage parent involvement in conventional ways that support the school agenda and contain parent participation, acting as a buffer rather than a bridge to the community (Auerbach, 2007b; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 2001; Griffith). Thus, we know little about how administrators actually "walk the walk" of leading for family engagement.

What steps do committed administrators take to promote meaningful family engagement in urban schools? This qualitative study explores this question among several critical cases in Los Angeles with two purposes: (1) to illustrate what is possible in this neglected arena of leadership, even among overburdened leaders in underachieving schools, and (2) to inform policy and practice in democratic school reform and leadership preparation.

Conceptual Framework

This work draws on models of role construction, opportunities to lead for school-community connections, and social justice leadership. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) theorize that the strongest predictor of parent involvement is how parents conceptualize and construct their role, that is, what they think and do regarding their responsibility to support education. Role construction may likewise shape how administrators work with families. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994) describe how "mental processes" – experiences, feelings, beliefs, and preferences – influence educational leaders' actions. Goldring and Hausman (2001) call for a "new mental model of schooling" in which principals "embrace a more community-oriented perspective [and]…view the development of civic capacity and community building as part of their roles" (pp. 198-199). What mental models or belief systems motivate administrators to lead for family engagement in education?

Honig's (1998) framework on the "opportunity to lead" for community-school connections is highly generative for this study. She posits that the alignment among four factors creates opportunities for leadership in community partnerships: (1) the principals' view of leadership and conception of their role; (2) the tasks required in particular partnerships; (3) the individual capacity of the principal; and (4) constraining and enabling conditions in the school, district, or neighborhood. This study examines the interplay of similar factors regarding families. How do administrators seek out, recognize, or create opportunities to lead for family engagement, thereby taking a proactive role?

Education for social justice implies collaboration between schools and families and the active pursuit of school-community partnerships, especially in urban schools where parents have traditionally been marginalized (Auerbach, 2007a; Furman & Shields, 2003; Hoff, Yoder, & Hoff, 2006). Theoharis (2007) uses a qualitative study of seven urban principals' enactment of social justice to elaborate theory on social justice leadership. In his study, outreach to marginalized families, increasing parent participation, and improving home-school relations were key elements of leaders' efforts to "strengthen school culture and community." These and other steps were taken by administrators not only to raise achievement but because they were seen as "the moral or right course of action" (p. 232). Theoharis suggests a "framework of resistance" that guided these leaders, in which they resisted the status quo of marginalization of certain groups at school, faced resistance from within and outside the school due to their social justice agenda, and developed inner resistance or resilience to sustain their social justice work. To what extent is leadership for family engagement in urban schools motivated by and integrated with a broader agenda of social justice leadership?

Methods and Data Sources

How do committed urban school administrators walk the walk toward meaningful family engagement? What leadership beliefs and strategies, as well as contextual factors, facilitate or constrain this process? What can preparation programs for administrators learn from these role models? I explored these questions in a case study of a purposeful subsample of four from a larger study of 35 administrators in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Auerbach, 2007b). The four administrators were selected as "critical cases" (exemplars) and "information-rich" participants due to their more proactive role in family engagement and more explicit community-based orientation when compared to those in the larger study.

Participants in this study were three Latino/a principals and one African American assistant principal, including two males and two females, all middle-aged, each with 10-25 years of administrative experience. Three were administrators at large, year-round, Title I elementary schools of 800-1,900 students, and one was principal of a Title I school of 570 students, in four of the eight local districts within Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).[1] The administrators' schools had student populations that were each at least 90% Latino, at least 90% eligible for free/reduced lunch, and 60-75% English Learners. All four schools were low-achieving according to the state's Academic Performance Index (API) accountability system based on standardized tests, with statewide ranks of 3 or below on a 10-point scale.

Data for this study were collected mainly through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with administrators; each interview was one and a half to three hours long and was audiotaped and transcribed. Interview data were triangulated with field notes from observations of administrators, staff, and parents at site-level parent meetings, workshops, and conferences, as well as informal interviews with other school staff and parent leaders. Additional data came from the review of parent-related documents such as school newsletters, web sites, press releases, and program materials.

Data were analyzed with the constant comparative method, first within-case through topical, theoretical, and en vivo coding, and then cross-case to determine broader patterns, emerging themes, and discrepancies. Member and colleague checks were done to verify understandings and enhance validity (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Findings are not meant to be generalized to populations, though they may be suggestive for researchers and educators in similar settings (Merriam).

The Broader Study Context

At the time of data collection, LAUSD had about 700,000 students and a number of structures and positions in place to promote parent involvement. In addition to a parent services branch at the central office, each local district had a parent ombudsperson to handle complaints, as well as parent facilitators to oversee mandated Title I and bilingual parent advisory councils at each school; some also had parent coordinators to organize parent outreach and training. At both the central office and local district level, there were parent newsletters and annual parent conferences with workshops on topics from science standards to No Child Left Behind. Not surprisingly, local districts and schools within this massive district varied widely in the resources, staffing, and support they gave to parent outreach and activities (Auerbach, 2007b). School mission statements posted in offices and web sites typically cited the importance of parent involvement and partnerships. Many schools had parent centers, adult education classes (e.g., English as a Second Language), parent workshops sponsored by nonprofit organizations, and on-site health and social services for families.

The present study is an outgrowth of a larger study on administrators' beliefs about family engagement and home-school relations (Auerbach, 2007b). Administrators in the larger study were selected by snowball sample of fellow administrators as having notable interest and expertise in parent involvement. They believed in the importance of family engagement and took symbolic steps to promote it – thus talking the talk (Auerbach, 2007b). They conceptualized parent involvement mainly as a tool for raising student achievement and positioned themselves in symbolic ways to promote such involvement, such as being highly visible and greeting parents who attended school activities. They tended to delegate the work of planning, organizing, and leading parent activities to support staff, such as parent center directors, and to favor parent training in academic topics. Conspicuously absent from most of their visions of family engagement was leadership to motivate and guide teachers in improving home-school communication or learning at home, as recommended by the parent involvement literature (Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997).

By contrast, the leaders examined in the present paper had a broader view of family engagement as empowerment and took a more proactive, direct role in promoting it at their schools – thus walking the walk. "If it's not the principal leading the charge, then it's not going to happen; we're just giving it lip service," as one principal said. These leaders had thought a great deal about families and communities in relation to schools, embedded their view of parent involvement in a community-oriented or social justice perspective on education,

sought out interaction with parents, and stressed relationship-building. They contrasted their approach to what they saw as some administrators' fear of parents and the tendency to distance themselves "at arm's length" or to do only the minimum mandated activities like Open House.

Findings for the four critical cases are presented below in contextualized portraits of administrators in action at their schools, with a focus on their role in and strategies to promote family engagement activities.

Empowering Parents for Community Uplift: Zavala's Parent Colloquium

On a Saturday morning before Caesar Chavez Day, dozens of Latino immigrant parents streamed across a school playground with children in tow to the 6th Annual Parent Colloquium/Conferencia Para Padres with a startling theme for a school-sponsored parent event in LAUSD: "Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Violence through Education." The parents were heading for a free breakfast of *pan dulce* (sweet rolls) and fruit and for registration tables staffed by friendly, young, Spanish-speaking teachers, where they received tote bags from the local district honoring the event. Parents chose two workshops from a menu of 15 while their children were sent to play supervised sports or computer games. Helping to set up for lunch with tablecloths, fresh flowers, and music was Principal Zavala, who initiated the conference out of his concern with "empowering parents as part of the political system of the city and the school system," particularly disenfranchised immigrant parents.

Zavala directs a year-round, low-achieving school of about 900 mostly Latino students in a poor, gateway immigrant neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles. The school community was struggling with gangs, drugs, inadequate housing, and mostly emergency credentialed teachers when Zavala arrived as principal in 2001. He was a former K-12 administrator, then working at a university, who was coaxed away from academe with a charge from the local district superintendent to "change the school culture." At the time, Zavala said, "parent involvement was nonexistent;" teachers blamed families for the school's problems in a deficit-model approach, rather than recognizing their assets.

Zavala began meeting with interested parents and teachers about new directions for the school. "Luckily, there were some believers on staff" who appreciated families' strengths, he said; Zavala recruited more who shared his philosophy and sense of urgency, including several National Board certified teachers. As part of its mandated improvement plan for underperforming schools under the state accountability system, the school brought in parent involvement programs from nonprofit providers, such as Families in Schools'

popular Lea Conmigo (Read With Me) program for first-graders and their families. Zavala believed strongly that activities for parents should be geared to their needs, interests, and literacy levels, rather than to what he saw as inflexible district mandates. He recalled a math coach offering a family math workshop without realizing that parents – many of whom had no formal schooling – did not understand the concept of digits. The school began offering workshops like cake decorating and basket making. "I made the choice of meeting parents where they are," Zavala explained.

A critical move was hosting 16 weeks of training in the American educational system and parent rights by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). The 30 parent participants did projects that put them in contact with city or school district officials. Zavala credits MALDEF training with developing a core group of well-informed, activist parents, who became the key planners of the school's Parent Colloquium.

The Parent Colloquium grew from 15 attendees the first year to more than 250 in 2007, with 40 of the school's 50 teachers participating. From its bold title to its political keynote speaker, from its unusual workshop offerings to the unexpected items on its information tables, such as a flyer for a march for affordable housing, this event had the stamp of parent voices and grassroots community organizing. The bilingual program booklet noted that the conference theme was at parents' request and that the focus, as in the past, was "the importance of communication between parents and their children, parents and their child's teacher, and between members of the same community."

The opening session in the auditorium was emblematic of Zavala's community-based agenda. It was conducted in Spanish, with the recitation of an inspirational poem in three languages (Spanish, English, and Kanjobal, an indigenous language spoken by about 100 Guatemalan families at the school). Zavala, tall and dignified in a *guayabera* shirt, spoke briefly about Chavez' legacy and transforming the community. An upbeat Latina school board member told the crowd "to demand services for our youth" to warm applause. The keynote speech by a Latino city councilman honored the sacrifices of immigrant parents, decried the growing "cancer of violence" in the city, and exhorted parents to "demand more low income housing. You can improve the situation by speaking up, knowing how to apply pressure.…This conference is about knowing what questions to ask," he said. The audience, about 90% female, appeared engaged in the question and answer session with the councilman, which focused on crime, drugs, and police-community relations.

Parent workshop offerings were on academic topics like those seen at many LAUSD schools, such as K-2 reading and learning through games, as well as on health (including obesity and depression), laws and political organizing

(including immigration and housing problems), and 4th-5th grade topics (including sex education and the road to college). Workshops were led by teachers or outside facilitators. In one, mothers brainstormed ideas with a nurse and middle school counselor on how to have good communication with preteens about sex, laughing over a mother-daughter role play done by visiting 8th graders. In another, parents asked pointed questions about teacher quality and parent volunteer obligations to a representative of Parent Union, a group advocating for the Green Dot network of charter schools.

Zavala described the Colloquium as the "culmination of what we do" in terms of raising awareness and addressing community needs as a "bridge" to meeting school goals. He felt this differs from parent events sponsored by the district, which are designed to meet district needs and school agendas. More important than the Colloquium itself, in his view, were the months of collective planning by parents and teachers that go into it. Zavala said that, over time, he has taken less of a directive and more of a support role in the Colloquium and other activities.

Zavala said he understands why some administrators fear parents, acknowledging that they can do "damage" from a principal's point of view. "Parents are a lot of work," he noted. "Part of the work is dealing with conflict; you cannot avoid it." He described parents at his school who positioned themselves as "power players who knew the right people" and "used their power incorrectly" to manipulate people – much like what administrators in the larger study called the "professional parents" who reportedly dominate school advisory councils (Auerbach, 2007b). Instead of seeing parents as a threat, Zavala urged new administrators to see their potential – to notice a group of parents at the school and think "I want to tap into that." He believed administrators should try to give parents the support they need to help their families and find ways to empower them to participate in the school and the broader community. "Though there will be conflict," he insisted, "parents are your best allies."

Making a "Human Connection" with Parents: Perez and the Parents as Authors Program

I first heard of Principal Perez from local district officials, who pointed to her as an outstanding example of principals with commitment to and expertise in working with parents. Perez was known for taking time out every week to meet with parents at her school and work with them on writing, especially in the creation of family books in the Parents as Authors program.

When I first met Perez, a neatly tailored, petite woman with a butterfly pin and a ready smile, she was reading aloud from "The Important Book,"

demonstrating how parents could borrow its poetic form to write about the special qualities of their own families. "We want you to appreciate what children go through when they write, to teach them your own appreciation of literacy," she told a small group of Latina, African American, and Hawaiian mothers gathered in the staff/parent room. "It's one of the most powerful things you can do as a parent." She gave them a template beginning, "The most important thing about X is that it is Y" and shared a tribute she had written to the "family" of staff that worked with her at the school, based on the template. She then led parents in a mapping exercise about the members of their family and adjectives to describe them, prompting easy chatter and laughter from parents as they wrote. "Can I put in my pet rat?" one asked. "I'd compare my daughter to a force of nature," commented another, and "I can't think of any adjectives for my husband!" Perez and staff circulated among the parents and helped as needed, in English and Spanish. One mother explained that she had already written four books in the Parents as Authors program, but now her fifth child was demanding one of his own. "It was hard for me to write the books because I don't have a lot of education," she said, "but I found it motivates my children. Sometimes I see them reading the books at home."

Perez has been principal for six years of a small elementary school near the freeway in a working-class neighborhood of Northeast Los Angeles. Every week for several months of the year for the past five years, she has taken an active part in the Parents as Authors program. Her role has ranged from writing presenter to tutor/assistant for individual parents to supervisor of child care to emcee of the culminating event on Dia del Niño (Children's Day), at which parents present the homemade books to their children. Though an enthusiastic young Latina teacher directs the program, Perez planted the seed by having teachers attend a bilingual education conference and encouraging the interested teacher to start the program. She set aside time for it during her Thursday Parent Platicas/Conversations meetings, using substitutes to cover participating teachers, and later paid teachers out of Title I monies for Saturday sessions. As an extension of the program, she asked all 5th grade teachers to help parents write a letter to their child, if not an entire book, in honor of their 5th grade culmination.

What motivates a busy urban principal to take the time to work directly with a group of parents? For Perez it was one of the most gratifying parts of her week. She saw parents as "the heartbeat of the school" and claimed to truly enjoy their company. "I love working with parents. I share a lot in common with the families.…They're open, they want to learn." Like Zavala, she believed that the school has a responsibility not only to children's learning and development but to the overall improvement of family and community life. "This job is not

always the most positive thing," she noted. "[Participating in these programs] is the one joy I have.…As principal, you have to connect with parents. My job is to support them. This is their school; I need to understand them." This view is remarkable for its contrast with what many administrators in the larger study reported regarding their fear or suspicion of parents in urban schools (Auerbach, 2007b).

Perez's interest in Parents as Authors as a vehicle for relating to parents also arose from a vision of parents participating in non-traditional ways:

> I want to break the mold of the parent as fundraiser, the PTA [as the focus]. Parents need to be part of the fabric of the school, to understand academics, as in why we are a PI5 school [Program Improvement 5 under NCLB], that we talk about at the Parent Platicas/Conversations. Parents can do a lot of other things.

Perez acknowledged that some parents are difficult to deal with – "you always have that parent who you fear her coming" – but found that her involvement in the program offered an alternative path to reach such people. The principal recalled one "combative" parent whom Perez got to know better through helping the mother with her book in Parents as Authors. Once Perez heard about the challenges the mother had faced coming to the U.S. alone at a young age, she could empathize; "after that we had the best relationship ever," she reported. "You have to understand where they're coming from. I hear the parents' stories [at Parents as Authors] and make a connection at such a human level." As explained by the young teacher who organized the program, "The parents open up because we [staff] open up."

Perez believed the program is "very empowering to the parents." Although she conceded it may not directly affect student achievement, it helps parents with limited education understand the writing process. The school's intervention coordinator found that parents were especially excited about learning basic computer skills as they published their illustrated books. Parents spoke gratefully of the program, in person and in a video that staff made for Dia del Niño: "Here you can express your thoughts and feelings." "This program shows us that we all have the capacity to do more." "There is unity between all of us as we work with the computers and print out our books." Indeed, in coming together to write about their culture, home remedies, or special moments in the life of their family, parents got to know each other more intimately than at more traditional parent activities like family math workshops or Open House.

As was evident at the weekly sessions and the Dia del Niño celebration, a key effect of the program was in reinforcing bonds between parent and child, parent and parent, and parent and school staff. As Perez put it, reading from a book she had written for the occasion: "We all spend time sharing our

thoughts, laughter, and sometimes tears. But the most important thing about Parents as Authors is that we come together as one community." At the celebration, students joined tables of their parents, grandparents, and younger siblings to leaf excitedly through the homemade books; parents exchanged books and bookmaking tips with their peers; staff received thank-you gifts decorated with parents' reflections; and families took photos of themselves with Perez and other staff while enjoying a potluck meal. This community-building function seemed to provide inherent satisfaction to the participants, seemingly energizing Perez for the more challenging parts of her job.

Perez attributed the program's success to being organized by teachers, who she felt often have a better relationship with parents; to having a "critical mass" of staff willing to work on Saturdays; and to a legacy of strong home-school relations under a previous principal who believed in "constructing the school together" with parents (Auerbach, 2007b). It may also be significant that Perez's school is one of a small number in LAUSD that continues to have bilingual classes in the wake of the Proposition 227 ban and takes part in a county-wide biliteracy project. Perhaps a school culture supporting bilingualism sets the stage for better home-school relations when most parents are not fluent in English.

Nurturing Parent-Teacher Relationships: Franco's House Meetings

Principal Franco is a portly, jovial man who seems to enjoy being a maverick. Above his office door, a sign reads "Principal Learner;" his office wall has posters featuring the work of psychologist James Comer, including the quote: "Nothing is more important to success in schools than relationships between and among students, staff, and parents." Franco's view of family engagement was shaped by his exposure to James Comer's School Development Program (one of the oldest and most respected parent involvement programs in the U.S.), as well as a local community organizing group and his own "take charge" philosophy of leadership.

For Franco, the essential core of family engagement is furthering the communication and relationship between teachers and parents. While this may seem obvious, especially at the elementary school level, it was rarely even mentioned by administrators in the larger study in interviews about promoting parent involvement (Auerbach, 2007b). When Franco set up monthly parent workshops and later an award-winning annual parent conference at his previous school in San Diego, the workshop leaders were his own teachers and support staff. "Parents may be getting wonderful information" when outside presenters from the county or nonprofit groups come in, he said. "But I got

to build that relationship with the teachers, not with strangers." The Saturday conference grew in popularity, with teacher-led family math, family science, and computer workshops followed by speeches from the superintendent, mayor, and local ministers. "Lunch time we totaled $1,000 worth of chicken," Franco recalled. "People from the neighborhood were coming just to eat the chicken! So that changed to when you go to your sessions, you get a ticket [laughs] and that's what's going to get you your chicken." By the time Franco came to his current, predominantly Latino, year-round elementary school of 1,800 in a small working-class city south of downtown Los Angeles, he had begun to question whether big annual informational meetings promote the kind of teacher-parent relationships he envisioned.

The organization One LA, an affiliate of Ernest Cortez's Industrial Areas Foundation, introduced Franco to more intimate approaches to relationship building and to the idea of "relational power," which stresses the power to take action with others rather than over them (Shirley, 1996). Franco was alienated by One LA's adversarial stance toward the system that he had to work within, and impatient with the group's focus on organizing parents around issues such as graffiti, traffic, and especially poor cafeteria food – what he termed a "black hole" topic with no resolution. Franco was more worried about making sure students could read and graduate from high school. But he was impressed with One LA's strategies of getting people to share stories and build common cause through neighborhood walks, small house meetings in people's homes, parent training in academics, and college planning at Achievement Academies.

Franco borrowed One LA's house meeting strategy and transferred it from living rooms to classrooms, led by his teachers rather than by outside community organizers. He started with nine interested teachers who experimented with the strategy for two years, then expanded school-wide at the request of parents on the school advisory council. Teachers were given a discussion guide that the school adapted from One LA for the one-hour meetings, covering the purpose (getting to know each other through story sharing), main activity (discussing what education means in parents' lives and their hopes and expectations for their children's education), and wrap-up/evaluation. Franco built teacher capacity for the meetings by having two teachers new to the process sit in on a house meeting led by a more experienced teacher, learning by observing and participating as preparation for hosting their own house meeting. Administrators took turns attending the meetings, some serving as translators when needed. The house meetings were voluntary for teachers since Franco did not pay them and could not compel them to stay after school; less than half of the school's teachers participated during the first year.

Franco described some of the first house meetings on the topic of "why education is important to me:"

> Answering some of those things, pretty soon the parents are crying, the teacher's crying, everybody's crying, and I'm sitting there going "holy-moly"…I've seen staff members break down and cry at one meeting and the next meeting they won't, depending on who's in the audience and how vulnerable you allow yourself to be.

The way people talked at those meetings reminded Franco of small towns and "it takes a village" slogans; by contrast, at a large urban school, "we're so fragmented, the people don't even talk to each other. So I'm very hopeful to bring a little bit of that small town concept back because people are actually talking to each other" at the house meetings. Teachers and staff reported finding the meetings helpful because they broke down the barrier that parents – especially low-income parents and parents of color – often feel with educators (cf. Auerbach, 2007a). "Parents told us they felt more comfortable after the meetings approaching teachers with questions," said the school's Bilingual Coordinator. "The parents are very receptive to it," the Title I Coordinator agreed. "They like sharing each other's stories and finding out more. It's not a typical parent-teacher meeting."

A house meeting on a warm summer afternoon in a 3rd grade bilingual classroom had what was considered a high (nearly full) turnout of 17 mothers and 5 fathers, all Latinos/as speaking only in Spanish. The young Latina teacher and Bilingual Coordinator opened the meeting with personal stories about their own education, then asked parents to share their stories, as well as their hopes and expectations for their children. Few parents actually talked about expectations; most discussed the limited opportunities they had in Mexico or Central America and the challenges of trying to help their children, given parents' long work hours and lack of academic skills. For example, one mother said she routinely had to pick up her children at the babysitter's at 1:00 a.m. due to her work schedule; the Bilingual Coordinator pointed to this later as the kind of telling detail that teachers might not otherwise know about their students' home lives. Some parents also used the forum to express gratitude for the school's bilingual program, which supported their family's efforts to "keep our language and our culture and our values," as one mother said. (As at Perez's school, the bilingual program is one of few still in effect in LAUSD since the passage of the Proposition 227 ban on bilingual education in 1998.) The teacher commented after the meeting: "It's nice to hear that parents support their kids, how they are working really hard for them, and they understand the goal is college…I want them to feel comfortable asking me anything." She viewed the house meeting as a step toward better communication at individual parent-teacher conferences and events like Open House, where she planned to invite parents to a six-week family reading workshop that she would be offering again for the second year.

Franco was hopeful that the hybrid form of house meetings he started would do more for parent involvement at the school than traditional activities like those of parent centers and parent advisory councils. He scoffed at the tendency of many administrators to merely "tolerate" parents at required activities like Open House, unless told by the district to do otherwise. The challenge, he said, was how to "make it systematic" so that an activity like house meetings would become a hallmark of school culture.

Advocating for Parents as Advocates: Young's Home Visits

When Assistant Principal Young interviewed for her current job, she was asked how she would increase parent involvement; her experience and commitment in this arena got her the job at a low-achieving school in a low-income pocket of a relatively affluent local district of LAUSD. Young's approach to leadership for family engagement has been honed over 25 years as an educator, especially in the quasi-administrative position of school coordinator overseeing Title I and bilingual categorical programs at another predominantly Latino elementary school. As school coordinator, she saw herself as a bridge between teachers and parents, and between parents and administration, building relationships with all stakeholders. She was convinced that it is those in bridging roles, rather than top administrators, who leverage action for family engagement in urban schools. Her experience shows the potential for distributed forms of leadership for parent involvement in large urban schools (Auerbach, 2007b) and the ways in which administrators, support staff, and faculty together may contribute to effective outreach. This potential is significant in a district like LAUSD, where out-of-classroom, quasi-administrative positions like school coordinator or literacy coach are often a stepping stone to assistant principal positions, providing valuable, direct experience with parents.

Young had the most outspoken advocacy orientation toward parent involvement of any of the administrators in the larger study:

> I've always believed that somebody has to be an advocate for the child. Someone. And if the teacher isn't, then the parents have to be.…And they have to be in there finding out what's going on in the classroom. They can't totally turn their child over to a teacher and say "you fix my child." Because educating a child takes a whole – you know, I'm a believer that it takes a village…I'm a product of the 1960s. So that's always been my philosophy.

Young's 11 years of teaching at a Catholic school in East Los Angeles, "where it was a natural thing to go to the families," helped reinforce this philosophy, as

did her experience as the child of a single mother and then a single mother herself, seeing the need for families to connect to the school. Her sense of urgency about parent advocacy relates to a tradition in many communities of color, in which a legacy of discrimination and mistrust leads some parents to try to protect their children from an indifferent, inadequate, or racist school system (Auerbach, 2007a; Lareau & Horvat 1999.)

Young's advocacy convictions suggest that her true sympathies lie with concerned parents rather than educators or the system per se. She claimed that bad teaching is allowed to go on due to parent ignorance of "what should be happening in the classroom.…The more that parents are educated…the more savvy they are, the more they can start speaking up and challenging some of these things. I believe that some of these people [bad teachers] need to be challenged." At her former school, Young advised both teachers and parents on how to handle such situations.

When Young first arrived as a teacher in LAUSD in the 1990s at her former school, parents were not welcome in the classroom – except in her classroom. As she got to know parents, they expressed a wish to understand more about the curriculum and school operations, prompting her to organize the school's first parent workshops. She continued to take her cue from parents, responding to their suggestion that teachers make home visits as a way to reach out to parents who did not feel comfortable at school. She organized a home visit program that involved many of the school's teachers in visiting 300 families over four months on a voluntary basis (including those in a homeless shelter), bringing school supplies and literacy materials. Like Cobbs and Ginsberg (2006), Young felt the program's clearest effect was on teachers:

> Sometimes teachers, because they're coming from another community, they really don't understand why certain things aren't taking place in the home. So when you go to a home and you see one room where everyone's staying…and they're sleeping in the living room, then you start understanding, "OK, this is why they can't get their homework done. This is why…they're not at school on time." So it helped to open up the teachers' eyes. And again, the ones that got involved, they became much more compassionate.

According to Young, the home visits had a "snowball effect" for participants, like teachers who then became active volunteers in the Homework Club, another program spurred by parent concerns. The home visits were one element of their parent involvement programs that led to the school receiving an award from the National Network of Partnership Schools. Young regretted that the momentum she created around parent involvement was not sustained in the

following years at the school, due to staff changes and lack of "capacity building." Other administrators, active in the same cluster of schools at the time, give similar accounts of a golden age of parent involvement in the 1990s that has since faded away considerably (Auerbach, 2007b).

Young insisted that leadership for family engagement begins with a belief, what she called "a natural feeling," for the role of parents in education and a sense of collective responsibility for children. The administrator has to believe that family engagement can happen in what she termed a "ghetto school" like hers and understand that low-income, immigrant parents are "devoted parents, hard working, trusting, compassionate, and very open. Very open to change." She believed the parents were "looking for a way to actually start being more involved in the school" and that it was up to the school to take a first step like a parent workshop: "they're just waiting for you to offer it." Without such commitment by the site leader, parent outreach efforts will "fall by the wayside," Young predicted, because they are difficult, low priority, and not the reason people become administrators.

At the practical level, Young thought administrators should get to know families by leading informal discussions, as in open forums where parents aired concerns about safety, homework, and the cafeteria. Principals should hire a dedicated person to work with parents, such as a parent center director, and a staff person to work with them, like a school coordinator; without this bridging between hands-on staff and administrators, good intentions can flounder. Principals also need to set aside funds, like the principal at her former school who gave teachers release time for parent involvement-related Action Planning Team meetings. Finally, though principals and assistant principals may be too busy to organize parent activities themselves, they should "keep an open ear" for needs and suggestions that might lead to new programs, services, or policies to help families.

Young was equally clear on impediments to leadership for family engagement. Just as one barrier was administrators who do not welcome parents, another was teachers who do not welcome parents to their classroom; however, she found that positive word of mouth from colleagues could erode teacher resistance over time. Another obstacle was pressure for space in overcrowded, year-round schools, where the parent center could be closed to be used as a classroom. Clannishness among parents who frequented the parent center, as if it belonged only to them, could likewise be a barrier.

Significantly, Young was less directly involved in promoting family engagement as an assistant principal than she was as a school coordinator. She brought parent workshop ideas to the parent center director and the literacy coach but considered her current school to be at the "beginning stages" of effective

outreach. While family engagement was still her passion, it was unclear to what extent she could pursue it in an official administrative role, especially given high stakes accountability pressures on low-achieving schools in the district.

Discussion: Paving the Way to Walking the Walk

As we have seen, these school leaders took a deliberate, proactive approach to walking the walk of promoting family engagement through parent activities that they initiated or led. Significantly, the activities were not grounded in purely academic school-based agendas but rather in broader community-based agendas that empowered families. In this, the leaders took a stand on what they felt mattered in family engagement, in line with their concerns about social justice and educational equity. Cross-case analysis suggested several themes regarding the beliefs, leadership strategies, and contextual factors that paved the way to these administrators walking the walk.

Believing It Is Possible and It Is Their Job to Make It Happen

The leaders in this study had given a great deal of thought to the importance of family engagement, either as an end in itself or as a means to a broader end such as community empowerment, especially at urban schools like theirs. They were convinced that meaningful family engagement was not only desirable, but possible in their schools, and that it was up to them to take proactive steps to achieve it. Thus, as in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) work, the role construction of these administrators was crucial in motivating their actions; as in Scheurich and Skrla's (2003) work regarding leadership for equity, the leaders "believed that the dream is possible" (p. 9) and acted accordingly.

Proactive Roles

As a measure of their commitment and leadership style, these leaders were more likely to be directly involved in initiating, planning, and implementing substantive activities with families, rather than appearing at events as figureheads and delegating the organization of activities to parent center staff, as most administrators in the larger study did (Auerbach, 2007b). These four leaders were dissatisfied with traditional approaches, such as PTA fundraisers or district-mandated advisory councils, and resolved to create alternative channels for family engagement at their schools, often in response to parent interest or demand. Perhaps these leaders sensed that without their personal involvement, less familiar forms of community outreach would be less effective. Over time, Zavala and Franco delegated the day-to-day organizing of parent activities, such as the Parent Colloquium or house meetings, to support staff. Perez,

however, was energized for her other tasks by having a hands-on role in Parents as Authors. Her response suggests that for some administrators with a community orientation, taking a proactive role in working with parents may be what Theoharis (2007) calls a "coping strategy" for dealing with the intense stress of the job.

Doing the Right Thing: A Social Justice Orientation

Like the social justice principals described by Theoharis (2007), these leaders were motivated by an ethical commitment. They believed that reaching out to parents was the right thing for schools to do, not simply a trend or a mandate. For three of the four, a strong interest in family engagement appeared to be part of a broader moral commitment to serving disenfranchised Latino immigrant families and to social justice goals of educational equity. All four leaders promoted authentic dialogue between families and educators that encouraged parents to articulate their dreams and goals for their children. Beyond the benefits for student achievement, the administrators saw the value of parent involvement for family health, lifelong learning, and greater access to life opportunities in underserved communities. Zavala, for example, was passionate about empowering parents to have a voice in neighborhood and community political issues, using the school as a vehicle for community education; Young saw promoting parent advocacy as the embodiment of her 1960's convictions that "it takes a village" to educate a child. These beliefs about the democratic purpose of schooling and the need for community empowerment for social uplift had a motivating force in spurring leaders to promote family engagement as a means to a larger end. This helped ensure that family engagement would be given a place of prominence in both the school culture and in the leader's view of his or her role. As in the Theoharis study, these social justice-oriented leaders persevered in spite of resistance by uninvolved parents and by some school staff, like the teachers who did not welcome parents as classroom volunteers at Young's school. Though none of the leaders reported direct opposition from other administrators, they implied that by failing to authentically engage the parents in their community, the central office and many fellow administrators were resistant to a social justice approach.

Community-Based Orientation and Relationship Building

These leaders knew their communities well and had both insight into and compassion for the families they served, each sharing some aspect of the parents' personal background like ethnicity, language, or single parent status. Like Murrell's (2001) "community teachers" in urban schools, community-oriented administrators often came from lower SES families of color like their students

or were fluent Spanish speakers who had taught for many years in predominantly poor, Latino neighborhoods (Auerbach, 2007b). Many administrators in the larger study named "relationship building" as part of their vision of parent involvement but few could be observed actually engaging in it with parents like the exemplary cases in this study. Their life experience and community orientation, combined with a passion for social justice, shaped their tendency to pursue more open relationships with parents as a hallmark of their leadership style.

Maintaining Bilingual Education Options and Reaching Out to Non-English-Speaking Parents

Though it was not intentional in the study design, three of the four leaders' schools were distinctive for being among the small number of LAUSD schools that have maintained bilingual programs through waivers since the state ban on bilingual education in 1998. Given that these are predominantly Latino schools with majorities of English Learner students and immigrant parents, having a school culture focused on bilingual and bicultural literacy may create conditions conducive to the positive, two-way home-school communication envisioned in parent involvement models (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Epstein, 1990). This goes beyond a principal speaking Spanish or ensuring that parents' home languages are accommodated by the school. By taking a stand on children's language learning that goes against the mainstream, these schools appear more community-oriented than most – perhaps a feature of a social justice orientation toward education and leadership that persists despite resistance to its agenda in the broader society.

Strategies Shaped by Models of Parent and Community Involvement

These leaders did not operate in isolation in their efforts with parents. Rather, they took the time to learn about and profit from models of parent involvement or school-community relations, such as Comer's School Development Program, Epstein's parent involvement typology (Epstein et al., 2002), and the community organizing approach of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Perez was similarly inspired by the emphasis on parent empowerment in the bilingual education initiative, Project MORE. Leaders' views were informed by these models, and they borrowed or adapted them for their schools as they saw fit. Leaders' schools also benefited from the availability of grants, awards, training, and technical support from national organizations, such as MALDEF and the National Network of Partnership Schools.

Constraining Factors

The emphasis here has been on facilitating factors that paved the way for school leaders to walk the walk. This reflects their can-do attitude in discussing their efforts, in contrast to administrators in the larger study who pointed more readily to constraining factors (Auerbach, 2007b). All four schools in this study were ranked in the lower third of California schools on the Academic Performance Index (API), well below state targets for academic achievement. Administrators there were under the same high-stakes accountability pressures as their peers in other underperforming urban schools, with the same limited resources characteristic of California schools generally when compared to other states. Yet the only one to point to such conditions as constraints on family engagement was Franco. He explained that he could not have initiated house meetings with parents until he had already been at the school for several years, after establishing improved instruction as his first priority; he also claimed he could not pay teachers to lead parent activities, while other principals used Title I funds for this. The most common constraint noted by these leaders seemed to be dealing with "combative" parents who administrators felt misused their power as parents. Yet as the data in the larger study reveal, some leaders used their initiatives to galvanize parent opinion on the advisory councils or to get to know and repair relations with parents who challenged the school. As a principal participating in the larger study commented, once administrators reach out and show their interest in and commitment to helping families, "parents can be your greatest allies" (Auerbach, 2007b).

Clearly, further research is needed to place this data in a more holistic context of administrators' overall approach to family/community outreach and to daily home-school interactions. To what extent were the activities profiled here an integral part of the school culture, with strong parent and staff participation? How did parents and staff view leaders' support for family engagement and its collaborative nature? How did leaders walk the walk of their professed beliefs in one-on-one interactions with parents, particularly those involving complaints or conflict?

Implications for Leadership Preparation Programs

How can leadership programs produce leaders who not only espouse a belief in family engagement but actively walk the walk to promote it in urban schools? Future administrators need more field experience working with parents and exposure to community-oriented leaders. Aspiring principals could benefit from learning about, or ideally meeting, administrators who walk the walk of

family engagement in innovative ways. Such leaders could serve as role models to those who are unsure how to proceed with parents or how to integrate family engagement into their leadership role. At minimum, this could be done in leadership preparation programs through guest speakers, shadowing, and site visits, as well as classes in school-community relations taught or team-taught by such individuals. Even more worthwhile would be project-based internships or apprenticeships with community-oriented principals. Future administrators could thereby get hands-on experience organizing parent activities and meeting parents face to face in school climates geared to family engagement and social justice. Another option would be research projects in which teams of aspiring administrators do home visits to investigate and learn from families' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

By examining critical cases of community-oriented school leaders who took proactive roles in working with parents, this study addresses gaps in both the parent involvement and the leadership literature. The better we understand how committed administrators both talk the talk and walk the walk of leading for family engagement, the better we can prepare future administrators for the skills of collaboration needed to lead urban schools as part of equitable, democratic communities.

Endnote

[1]Assistant Principal Young discussed both her previous school and her current school, both in LAUSD. Summary information here on school demographics and test performance refers to her previous school, which was the focus of her portrait. Her current school had a lower percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch (32%) and a higher Academic Performance Index (5) than the other schools.

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An Urban School District's Parent Involvement: A Study of Teachers' and Administrators' Beliefs and Practices

Natalie Conrad Barnyak and Tracy A. McNelly

Abstract

This quantitative study examines the practices and beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding parent involvement in an urban school district following the first year of the implementation of an action plan based on six national standards for parent involvement (National PTA, 1997). The theoretical framework is based upon Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. Administrators and teachers from an urban school district were surveyed. The instrument used for this study was adapted from "The Parent Involvement Inventory" published by the Illinois State Board of Education (1994). A two-tailed t-test was conducted and findings indicate some statistically significant differences between many beliefs and practices. The results of this study show a mismatch between teachers' and administrators' beliefs and practices about parent involvement. Although teachers and administrators have strong beliefs about parent involvement and its importance in strengthening student achievement, what they practice in their schools and classrooms is not congruent with these beliefs.

Key Words: parental involvement, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, urban education, teachers, administrators, beliefs, practices, urban school districts, family engagement, families, parents

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The recent legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has put parent involvement at the forefront of national policy. The law requires school districts who receive federal funds to inform parents how they can be involved in their children's schools and requires school districts to disseminate an annual district report card to parents. This has prompted many school districts across the country to re-examine current parent involvement policies and programs to ensure they are in compliance in order to continue to obtain federal education funding through programs such as Title I. Parent involvement policies and programs are not new to most school districts. What has changed is the educational environment, which is asking public school districts to be more accountable for student achievement. This change brings challenges for many school districts who struggle to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of low achievement scores or low attendance rates. "Just as no child should be left behind, so, too no parent should be left behind in the American educational enterprise" (Lapp & Flood, 2004, p. 70); therefore, school districts must realize the importance that families play in children's school success and take responsibility for bridging the home and school environments.

Families have a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Students' development and academic progress are affected by the beliefs and practices of the teachers and administrators within the school district. School leaders have a strong impact on the priority placed on parent involvement within their schools and in the overall community (Protheroe, Shellard, & Turner, 2003). In addition, teachers must realize that they are not only working with children, but also with their students' families (Kirschenbaum, 2001). Although family involvement at the elementary level is more prevalent, recent research has focused on the lack of family involvement at the middle and high school levels (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Schools must consistently encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning at all grade levels. Respectful relationships and supportive links between schools, families, and communities are imperative to successful partnerships (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005).

This study examines the practices and beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding family involvement in an urban school district following the first year of the implementation of an action plan to improve parent involvement based on six national standards for parent involvement (National PTA, 1997). The district was 1 of 13 districts in Pennsylvania selected to send a team to the

first Governor's Institute for Parental Involvement. The team of two educators and four parents attended the institute for two weekends in the fall of 2004.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are urban teachers' and administrators' practices regarding family involvement?
2. What are urban teachers' and administrators' beliefs about family involvement?
3. Using the literature on family involvement as a set of evaluative criteria, what characteristics of urban teachers' practices and beliefs about family involvement are consistent with the literature on family involvement?
4. What effects do urban teachers' and administrators' beliefs about family involvement have on their practices of family involvement in their schools?

Literature Review

Parent Involvement Practices of Teachers and Administrators

Parent involvement may be viewed as multidimensional due to the fact that researchers have utilized various models and definitions (Pelco, Jacobson, Ries, & Melka, 2000). Parent involvement research can generally be categorized into three areas which include: at-risk studies that involve below average parent involvement, descriptive studies that describe parent involvement within children's schools, and outcome-based studies that link student learning and parent involvement (Griffith, 1998). Several organizational characteristics must be considered in order to build successful family-school partnerships. Parent empowerment, good communication, and school climate are significant factors within positive family-school relationships (Griffith). Cochran and Dean (1991) discuss the "empowerment process" which includes self-perception, an emphasis on relationships, and social action regarding children. Empowerment focuses on all families' strengths and the belief that differences do not constitute deficits (Cochran & Dean). Another factor includes schools sharing information with parents about their children's education (Griffith). Communication is a vital component of parent involvement programs (Bridgemohan, van Wyk, & van Staden, 2005). However, communication is typically from school to home, and barriers such as language differences may exist (Bridgemohan et al.; Peña, 2000). Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and van Staden found that parents often have limited opportunities to initiate communication with their children's schools. Therefore, dedicated parent involvement coordinators and organized programs are beneficial for parent involvement efforts to flourish (Epstein & Becker, 1982). There is a lack of knowledge regarding the sociological teaching and organizational context within urban schools and their influence on

home-school communication which must be addressed when creating and implementing programs (Bauch & Goldring, 2000). In order to foster parent involvement, school districts' practices and policies should build trust between families, teachers, and administrators (Feuerstein, 2000).

Depending upon the types of parent involvement activities that are offered, teachers play either a direct or indirect role (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). For example, teachers play a direct role when parents volunteer in classrooms or are employed as paid paraprofessionals; teachers play an indirect role when they motivate parents to participate in learning activities at home with their children. Regardless of their role, teachers maintain an important influence on parent involvement activities (Greenwood & Hickman). When teachers contact parents, parent participation in organizations (e.g., the PTO) and volunteerism typically increase (Feuerstein, 2000). Some traditional parent involvement activities include: open houses, parents attendance during events/classroom activities, parent-teacher conferences, child-delivered notes for communication, and counseling for parents (Greenwood & Hickman). When parents volunteer, teachers must involve them in meaningful tasks in order to use their talents and time wisely (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman; Kyriakides, 2005; O'Connor, 2001). Within many elementary and secondary schools, students are assigned homework, and parental support is often requested by teachers (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). While helping their children with homework, parents model skills and attitudes, provide reinforcement and feedback, and engage their children in instruction. Parents typically help their children with homework due to the following reasons: beliefs that they ought to be involved; beliefs that their involvement is beneficial; and perceptions that their involvement is welcomed and expected (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Although the traditional forms of parent involvement are familiar to most, they should not be considered the only forms (Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman).

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) conducted a study to examine the implementation of community and family involvement activities in an effort to reduce student discipline problems and promote student learning. Two types of involvement, parenting and volunteering, were the most predictive for reducing student discipline problems within schools. "Parenting" is defined as "helping all families establish home environments to support children as students;" "volunteering" relates to "recruiting and organizing families to help the school and support students" (Sheldon & Epstein, p. 5). The teachers described numerous student and/or parent benefits that they perceived resulting from parental involvement which include: improved basic skills, better skill retention throughout the summer, enhanced in-class behavior of students, enrichment, positive

self-images of parents due to successful home-school cooperation, and a wider array of parent-generated materials for classrooms (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Thus, there are many advantages to parent involvement including the reduction of student discipline problems.

Parent Involvement Beliefs of Teachers and Administrators

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about parent involvement are greatly influenced by their views and participation in school life. When teachers perceive their school has a caring atmosphere, parents are more likely to be involved (Bauch & Goldring, 2000). Epstein and Becker (1982) address the findings from comments from over 1,000 teachers on a survey about parent involvement; teachers' time, parents' time, and students' time and feelings were addressed. Teachers mentioned the abundance of time that it takes to implement parent involvement practices (Chavkin & Williams, 2001; Epstein & Becker). Teachers surveyed by Epstein and Becker also acknowledged the various duties that parents have within the home that may contribute to a lack of time for parent involvement in their children's education. In addition, teachers described the importance of students' out-of-school time to relax, play, and pursue their own interests. Teachers did suggest that even brief amounts of time that parents spend on home learning activities with their children can be quite beneficial if the time is used wisely. However, teachers also felt that the children whose parents did not take part in home learning activities with them were at an academic disadvantage. Many teachers described their principal's support and school climate as important aspects for successful parent involvement programs (Epstein & Becker).

Parents' involvement in home learning activities with their children often constitutes both positive and negative responses from educators. Some teachers believe that academic-related interactions between children and parents provide educational support, while others believe that teaching academic skills is the teacher's responsibility (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986). Becker and Epstein conducted a survey of 3,700 first, third, and fifth grade public school teachers. The teachers described their professional attitudes and teaching practices. Also, over 600 elementary school principals participated in a brief questionnaire about parent involvement programs. Overall, the survey yielded highly positive views of teaching strategies that were parent-oriented. About half of the teachers reported some parent involvement in the classroom. Therefore, parents' observations while volunteering may lead to effective home learning activities related to school. Communications that involve "traditional" parent-teacher interactions (e.g., open house, parent-teacher conferences) were viewed favorably by both teachers and principals. Some teachers described

active use of parent involvement strategies regardless of the various educational levels of the parents. The survey results indicated that teachers who do not use parent involvement techniques and teach children of less educated parents believed the parents would be unlikely to complete homework-related activities with their children.

Although teachers reported using personal contact with parents (e.g., brief conversations, telephone conversations, conferences, and special appointments), home visits were infrequently used. However, teachers who did make home visits were more inclined to have positive views about parent involvement techniques (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Sometimes home visits conducted by teachers or parent involvement coordinators are used to deliver home learning materials (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some successful parent involvement activities were described by teachers as the following: parents reading with children at home, signing papers and/or folders, conferencing at convenient times for parents, home visits, and summer learning activities to complete at home (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Teachers and Administrators: Self-Efficacy Regarding Parent Involvement

Efficacy "manifested by confidence in one's teaching and instructional program…implies a sense of professionalism and security in the teaching role. Such confidence would logically enhance teachers' efforts to discuss their teaching program and goals with parents" (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987, p. 429). The greatest amount of parent involvement occurs when teachers with positive attitudes regarding parent involvement maintain open communication with parents and collaborate with them; when administrators and teachers initiate and welcome parent involvement, it can be successful (Griffith, 1998). Thus, in order to improve parent-teacher relations, principals should make a conscious effort to promote teacher efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) conducted a study of 66 schools within eight school districts. Questionnaires were distributed to 66 principals and 1,003 teachers. Upon completion of the study, the researchers reported that the strongest predictor for teacher support of parent involvement was teacher efficacy, that is, teachers' beliefs regarding teaching effectiveness. Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues describe teacher efficacy related to four different parent involvement practices which include: (1) conferences, (2) parent volunteers, (3) parents as tutors, and (4) teacher perception regarding support of parents. Teacher concerns focus on the following: undependable volunteers, failure of parents to implement home learning activities, lack of discipline in the home, and teachers' fear of parent contact (Epstein & Becker,

1982). In regard to home tutoring, principals' perceptions of teachers' efficacy were significant contributors. Therefore, principals who believe their teachers are highly efficacious may communicate this belief to both parents and teachers, thus promoting positive expectations for student learning (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

It is also important to remember that parent efficacy is critical for effective parent involvement (O'Connor, 2001; Swick, 1988). As previously stated, parent involvement typically decreases as children's grade level increases (Griffith, 1998). This may be due to parental beliefs that children become more independent as they grow older and parental support is no longer needed. Parents may also feel that they lack the skills to assist their children with more difficult content in various subject areas. Griffith studied the social and physical environments of schools and whether the perceptions of all parents regarding a school's social environment impacted the involvement and perceptions of individual parents. Findings indicated that families with lower socioeconomic status usually had lower parent involvement. The limited involvement may be due to time demands/work schedules and to attitudes and practices within schools that suggest parents lack the abilities to help (Griffith). Barriers to parent involvement may include: parents' fatigue, parents' lack of awareness of their rights as well as school policies and procedures, and limited opportunities for parent involvement (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Logistical limitations, such as lack of transportation or child care and language barriers may also exist (Geenen et al., 2001; Peña, 2000). Thus, school systems must make concerted efforts to eliminate barriers and form true partnerships with families.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Efficacy

The conceptual framework for this study draws on the work of Bandura's (1977a) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. This theory argues that people create self-perceptions of capability that become influential to their pursuits. In other words, people's beliefs about their capabilities are critical in determining their successes in specific tasks. Strong self-efficacy beliefs are usually the result of prior experience with similar tasks (Pajares & Shunk, 2001). When people are highly self-efficacious, they tend to undertake more challenging tasks, set higher goals for themselves, and persist longer to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1997; Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005). This research hypothesizes that the practices of teachers and administrators are influenced by various beliefs. Bandura's (1977a) theory of self-efficacy implies that the

efficacy beliefs of teachers are related to their instructional practices. A strong sense of self-efficacy for specific tasks influences the level of accomplishment.

The research on teacher efficacy and parent involvement provides evidence of a connection between the two (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). Garcia's study of elementary teachers in a large urban school district revealed that teacher efficacy was significantly correlated to the family involvement practices found in Epstein's (1995) typology: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) also found teacher efficacy to be a predictor for parent involvement in school, classroom, and home activities. Given the prior research on the topic, this study hypothesizes that practices of teachers to engage in family involvement are influenced through various beliefs. Teachers with higher efficacy for family involvement create classroom environments that provide substantial opportunities for family involvement activities.

Unlike traditional behaviorists, Bandura (1986) disagreed with the contention that one's environment alone causes behavior. Instead, he felt that a cause/effect relationship exists between environment and behavior—both simultaneously creating and affecting one another. Subsequently, he argued that it is one's beliefs that enable him to control his thoughts and actions, ultimately affecting behavior. His social cognitive theory explains this in terms of triadic reciprocal causation: "In this causal mode, cognitive and other personal factors, behavior, and environmental events all influence one another bidirectionally" (Bandura, 1977b, p. 454). Bandura (1997) believed people to be active participants in the construction of learning. He felt that in "a social cognitive view, people function as active agents in their own motivation rather than being simply reactive to discordant events that produce cognitive perturbations" (p. 133). In other words, constructing meaning is an ongoing process that relies on the mind's ability to choose important stimuli in order to solve problems. When people realize they lack comprehension, they decide whether or not they want to learn something new to gain that comprehension. If they are motivated, they will construct new meaning. To better illustrate this theory, Bandura (1986) posits three constructs: observational learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. For the purpose of this study, self-efficacy will be the only construct of the three examined.

Bandura (1986) proposes that self-efficacy, defined as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391), plays the most influential role in determining one's choices, effort, perseverance, and degree of anxiety or confidence one brings to the task at hand. There are also different types of

self-efficacy which include: *general* self-efficacy (GSE), believing in one's capabilities to deal with adverse situations and new tasks, and *specific* self-efficacy, limited to an explicit task (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Self-efficacy is different than self-esteem, a term coined by William James in 1890. Self-esteem is used to describe how people feel about themselves in relation to the success with which they accomplish things they want to accomplish. Self-esteem is an evaluative component and involves personal approval or disapproval of self or personal judgment of one's worthiness (Pajares & Shunk, 2001). Self-efficacy is also different from self-concept. Coopersmith and Feldman (1974) describe self-concept as "beliefs, hypotheses, and assumptions that the individual has about himself" (p. 199). Self-concept can be compared to the looking-glass self metaphor whereby an individual's sense of self is formed by his or her perceptions of others' views.

In contrast to self-esteem and self-concept, self-efficacy is task or context specific. Someone may have a high self-efficacy for some tasks and not others and in some contexts and not others (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). What people do and how they behave is predicted more by their beliefs about their competence than by what they actually accomplish. For example, one's self-efficacy for driving a car may change dependent on the conditions of the road; a student's self-efficacy for writing may depend on the assignment. Therefore, people's self-efficacy helps explain why people have differing behaviors even when they have similar knowledge and skills (Pajares, 1992; Pajares & Shunk, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Moreover, unlike self-concept, self-efficacy does not involve cultural or social considerations. Since self-concept involves self-worth, it is dependent partially on how culture or society values the characteristics by which an individual bases his feelings of self-worth. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is a judgment one has in his or her abilities. It is really a difference in the source of a person's judgment; self-concept judgments rely on social and self-comparisons and performance whereas self-efficacy judgments rely on a person's judgment about his or her ability to accomplish tasks (Pajares & Shunk).

Teachers' instructional beliefs have become an issue for research in educational reform. Some have argued that teacher instructional beliefs have a strong impact on reforming teaching and learning (Handal, Bobis, & Grimison, 2001; Lovat & Smith, 1995; Wenner, 2001). Larry Cuban posits, "The knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that teachers have…shape what they choose to do in their classrooms and explain the core of instructional practices that have endured over time" (1993, p. 256). As a result of the low degree of success in many educational innovations, it is important that teacher beliefs be explored prior to implementation of new educational innovation (Fullan, 1993).

Teacher efficacy, defined as "a teacher's expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning" (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 2001, p. 141), influences classroom innovation. Gibson and Dembo (1984) suggest that teacher efficacy be subdivided into general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. General teaching efficacy is a teacher's belief that certain teaching practices or behaviors, such as involving parents, can affect student performance; whereas, personal teaching efficacy is a teacher's personal sense of his or her ability to perform the activities necessary to affect student performance. It has been suggested that the first years of teachers' careers may be pivotal to their long-term efficacy development (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Since it appears that teachers' self-efficacy affects both teaching and learning, "the origins, supports, and enemies of efficacy" are of interest to policymakers, administrators, and teacher educators (Hoy & Spero, p. 343).

Many studies have found a relationship between teacher efficacy and educational reform. Teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to try new teaching methods, even those thought to be difficult to implement (Allinder, 1994; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1987; Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1992). Other studies have found a relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) suggested that levels of efficacy influence teachers' behaviors, which influence student behaviors leading to student achievement. Several researchers support this hypothesis (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992). Teacher efficacy has also been linked to student motivation (Ross, 1994; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990) and higher expectations for students (Allinder, 1995; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Ross, 1994). Thus, teachers' and principals' self-efficacy may greatly determine if and how schools districts plan, implement, and support successful parent involvement programs.

Method

This quantitative study included 92 practicing male and female teachers (grades K-12) and 7 administrators in an urban school district in Pennsylvania who were part of a statewide parent involvement initiative during the 2004-2005 school year. The study was described by the principal investigator at a district-wide in-service meeting. Each teacher and administrator received a letter describing the study and a script was read to the participants. The instrument used for this study was adapted from "The Parent Involvement Inventory" published by the Illinois State Board of Education (1994). The instrument was intended to provide information regarding district, teacher, and administrator family involvement practices and beliefs. The survey asked teachers and

administrators to provide information about current family involvement practices in their district and school based upon the following categories: teacher/coach, supporter/volunteer, communicator, learner, advocate/decision maker, and home/school/community partners. Using a five-point Likert Scale, teachers and administrators were also asked about practices and beliefs about family involvement. In addition, the survey asked participants to provide demographic variables such as degree attained, age, gender, years of teaching experience, and current position in the district; distribution frequencies were calculated to summarize participants' responses. A paired t-test was used to examine the relationship between teacher and administrator beliefs about parent involvement and their practices of parent involvement in their classrooms and schools.

Summary of Research Findings

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Urban Teachers and Administrators

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent		Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age				Grade Level		
20-29	17	17.3		K-3	23	24.0
30-39	22	22.4		4-6	14	14.6
40-49	24	24.5		7-8	19	19.8
50-59	35	35.7		9-12	33	34.4
60+	0	0		Administrator	7	7.3
Total	99			Total	96	
Missing	1			Missing	3	
				Highest Degree		
Gender				Bachelors	30	31.3
Female	68	70.8		Bachelors +25	18	18.8
Male	28	29.2		Masters	31	32.3
Total	96			Masters +	17	17.7
Missing	3			Total	96	
				Missing	3	
Years Teaching						
0-5	11	11.5				
6-10	31	32.3				
11-15	24	25.0				
16-20	15	15.6				
21-25	15	15.6				
26-30	0	0				
Over 30	0	0				
Total	96					
Missing	3					

Demographics

After considering the various demographic data, the largest representative groups (35.7%) were teachers and administrators ages 50-59. However, the other age groups were represented equally. The sample consisted of mostly females (70.8%) with 6-10 years of teaching experience (32.3%) who teach at the secondary level in grades 9-12 (34.4%). The master's degree (32.3%) was the highest degree level achieved by most of the sample. This demographic data is fairly representative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education Statistics (2007) in all categories. See Table 1 for a detailed description of the demographic data.

Parent Involvement Practices

District/School Level Practices

Participants were asked to answer questions about the occurrence of various school and district level parent involvement practices. The participants gave evidence that the school supported parent involvement in a variety of ways: through the support of student learning, soliciting volunteers to help in school buildings, providing parent communication in a variety of languages, providing parents access to classes, giving parents input in school decisions, providing teachers with resources to improve parent involvement practices, and assessing the relationships between parents and teachers.

A majority of participants were unsure about school and/or district volunteer programs and opportunities the school and/or district provided for parent learning, such as GED classes, parenting classes, computer literacy classes, study skills classes, and so on. A majority of the participants were also unsure if the school and/or district provided parents with opportunities to help with policy and decision making on committees. Frequencies of all district and school level parent involvement practices are available from the authors upon request (contact information is available at the end of this article).

Teacher/Administrator Practices

The parent involvement practices of teachers and administrators were calculated using distribution frequencies. Teachers were asked to respond to the items about parent involvement practices on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = once in a while, 4 = pretty often, and 5 = almost always. When asked about ways to inform parents about a homework policy, the majority of respondents almost always used a school handbook, parent orientation, and an assignment notebook and/or special information sheet. There were several items that were never used by a majority of teachers to keep parents informed, including the following: newsletter, homework calendar, homework hotline,

teacher contract, teacher web page, and e-mail to parent(s). The survey also asked teachers to respond to how they provide parents with specific ways to monitor homework. The majority of participants responded that they never use a newsletter, interactive homework, teacher web page, or e-mail to parent. They responded that they "pretty often" use parent-teacher conferences and special information sheets. When asked if and how they provide information to parents about educational opportunities and if they provide home projects to reinforce classroom work, the majority of participants responded that they never do so. On the other hand, when asked if they are accessible to parents, the participants resoundingly responded that they are almost always available during prep time, after school, before school, by appointment, and via e-mail. The majority also held parent-teacher conferences either once or twice per school year or as needed. Finally, teachers responded that they "almost always" used progress reports and/or telephone conferences to notify parents when a child was having academic difficulty and provided guidance to parents about how to help their child. The majority of teachers responded that they "never" used teacher web pages or e-mail to notify parents of academic difficulty. Table 2 provides a list of the mean and standard deviation for participant practices.

Table 2. Effects of Parent Involvement Beliefs on Parent Involvement Practices

		Teacher Beliefs		Teacher Practices		
Keep Parents Informed of Classroom-Homework Policy	N	M	SD	M	SD	t
Handbook	49	3.95	1.15	3.10	1.65	1.84
Parent Orientation	48	4.10	1.07	3.35	1.53	1.68
Newsletter	49	4.16	1.02	2.32	1.25	4.24***
Homework Calendar	44	3.53	1.22	2.11	1.41	2.86**
Assignment Notebook	44	3.70	1.13	3.10	1.45	1.43
Homework Hotline	47	3.21	1.44	1.26	.733	5.26***
Special Information Sheet	48	3.80	1.32	3.35	1.35	.987
Teacher Contract	47	3.44	1.42	2.78	1.63	1.36
Teacher Web Page	46	3.28	1.45	1.39	1.45	4.35***
E-mail to Parents	46	3.11	1.49	2.06	1.26	2.16*
Specific Ways to Monitor Homework						
Newsletter	42	3.40	1.21	1.81	1.22	7.31***
Parent Teacher Conference	44	4.34	.939	3.66	1.24	3.10**
Interactive Homework	41	3.54	1.21	2.29	1.49	4.50***
Special Information Sheet	44	3.61	1.22	3.07	1.42	2.44*
Teacher Web Page	42	3.21	1.22	1.62	1.31	6.04***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.35	1.39	1.93	1.10	6.15***
Information about Libraries, Book Clubs, Educational Opportunities						
Newsletter	44	4.30	.904	2.27	1.53	7.41***
Parent Resource Room	41	3.51	1.19	1.20	.511	12.03***

		Teacher Beliefs		Teacher Practices		
Parent Tip Sheets	41	3.83	1.02	1.61	1.09	9.03***
Daily Activity Calendar	41	3.68	1.13	2.05	1.47	5.82***
Parent In-Service	40	3.98	.920	1.63	1.08	9.73***
Teacher Contract	42	3.48	1.27	2.45	1.42	3.77**
Informational Brochures	40	4.03	.947	2.30	1.49	5.93***
Teacher Web Page	40	3.50	1.11	1.40	.982	9.42***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.40	1.28	1.58	.984	7.78***
Holding Parent Conferences						
Once Per Year	38	4.13	1.12	3.58	1.77	2.30*
Twice Per Year	41	4.10	.917	3.39	1.63	3.28**
Quarterly	36	3.42	1.03	2.25	1.32	5.58***
As Needed	43	4.70	.513	4.21	.965	3.10**
During School Hours Only	37	3.59	1.24	3.54	1.50	.183
Combination Evening/School Hours	36	3.69	1.33	2.72	1.52	3.88***
Easily Accessible						
Prep Time	44	4.36	.810	4.70	.632	2.81**
After School	45	3.47	1.20	3.53	1.36	.380
Before School	45	3.53	1.20	3.84	1.30	2.01
By Appointment	49	4.65	.481	4.57	.791	.727
By E-mail	42	3.81	1.22	3.88	1.55	.380
Projects to Reinforce Class Work						
Student and Parent Information Sessions	41	3.68	.986	2.20	1.37	7.96***
Science Fairs	39	3.33	1.06	1.51	.997	9.74***
Home Learning Packets	40	3.48	1.01	2.00	1.30	7.93***
Other Academic Fairs	38	3.39	.946	1.42	.793	11.29***
Family Math Night	40	3.43	.958	1.38	.774	11.70***
Family Reading Night	40	3.43	.958	1.60	.982	10.43***
Notify Parents about Academic Difficulty						
Written Progress Reports	45	4.73	.447	4.38	.650	-3.51**
Individual Student Conferences	41	4.46	.809	3.71	1.12	-4.64***
Telephone Conferences	42	4.74	.497	4.43	.668	-2.95**
Student/Parent Contracts	42	4.00	1.10	2.76	1.46	-6.66***
Team Meeting with Parents	42	4.26	.885	3.02	1.37	-7.02***
Teacher Web Page	40	2.90	1.17	1.30	.791	-8.80***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.38	1.23	2.28	1.28	-5.21***
Provide Suggestions to Parents to Prevent Failure						
Written Progress Reports	44	4.45	.548	4.23	.886	-2.03*
Individual Student Conferences	42	4.33	.816	3.79	1.16	-3.77**
Telephone Conferences	43	4.51	.592	4.30	.860	-2.03*
Student/Parent Contracts	42	3.76	1.23	2.74	1.45	-6.07***
Teacher Web Page	40	3.00	1.09	1.35	.802	-9.12***
E-mail to Parents	39	3.44	1.27	2.18	1.23	-5.36***

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

Parent Involvement Beliefs

The parent involvement beliefs of teachers and administrators were calculated using distribution frequencies. Teachers and administrators were asked to respond to the items about beliefs based on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Teachers and administrators "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that a variety of methods were beneficial to help inform parents about homework policies; these included a handbook, parent orientation, newsletter, homework calendar, assignment notebook, special information sheet, and teacher contract. They also believed that using parent-teacher conferences, special information sheets, and e-mail to parents were good ways to help parents monitor homework. Teachers and administrators also agreed that newsletters, parent resource rooms, parent tip sheets, daily activity calendars, parent in-services, teacher contracts, information brochures, teacher web pages, and e-mail to parents were good ways to inform parents about upcoming educational opportunities for their child. Moreover, they agreed that holding a parent informational session, science fairs and other academic fairs, providing home-learning packets, and hosting math and reading nights were good ways to reinforce classroom work. The majority of teachers and administrators "agree" and/or "strongly agree" that it is important to hold parent-teacher conferences once or twice per year, or as needed, offered both during evening and regular school hours. The majority also "agree" and/or "strongly agree" they should be accessible to parents during prep time, after school, before school, by appointment, and via e-mail. Finally, teachers and administrators "agree" and/or "strongly agree" to notify parents when a child is having academic difficulty and to provide guidance to parents about their child's academic difficulty through progress reports, student and phone conferences, contracts, meetings with parents, and e-mail to parents. Table 2 provides a listing of the mean and standard deviation for participant beliefs.

Effects of Teachers' Parent Involvement Self-Efficacy on Parent Involvement Practices

The research on parent involvement indicates that teachers and administrators have a strong influence on parent involvement. Teachers' practices, attitudes, and beliefs about parent involvement are correlated to more involvement in schools and in at-home educational activities by parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burrow, 1995). There has been a great deal of research and literature on the effects of and linkages between parents' self-efficacy and their involvement with their children's education at

home and at school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Watkins, 1997). The research on teachers' self-efficacy and parent involvement is more limited. Much of the literature that does exist finds that a teacher's self-efficacy is a predictor for parent involvement practices in the classroom (Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, 1992). Teachers' beliefs about the impact they have on parent involvement have been found to be a predictor of teachers' effort to encourage parent involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

This study analyzed teachers' and administrators' self-efficacy beliefs about parent involvement in comparison to their parent involvement practices in terms of the following: how they believe various methods will help them keep parents informed of classroom homework policies; providing parents specific ways to monitor homework; providing parents with information about libraries, book clubs, and other educational opportunities; holding parent conferences; being accessible to parents; providing parents with projects to reinforce class work; and notifying parents about academic difficulty. Teachers and administrators were asked to respond to the items about beliefs based on a five-point Likert scale; similarly, teachers and administrators responded to items about practices on a five-point Likert. The overall findings indicate that there is a mismatch between what a majority of teachers and administrators believe about parent involvement and the parent involvement practices in which they are engaged in their classrooms and schools. This is contrary to much of the literature, which finds teacher efficacy associated with parent involvement practices and outcomes. A summary of all of the data on the effects of teachers' beliefs on parent involvement practices can be found in Table 2.

When asked about their practices and beliefs of keeping parents informed of homework policies, a majority of teachers and administrators both believed in and practiced the use of a handbook, parent orientation, assignment notebook, special information sheets, and teacher contracts as vehicles to keep their parents informed. Although teachers and administrators had strong beliefs about using a newsletter, homework calendar, homework hotline, teacher webpage, and e-mail to parents as ways to inform parents about homework policies, there was a significant difference in what they actually practiced.

When asked about their practices and beliefs of providing parents with specific ways to monitor homework, there was a statistically significant difference in teacher and administrator beliefs and practices. Teachers and administrators had strong beliefs that using a newsletter, holding parent-teacher conferences, using interactive homework, special information sheets, teacher web pages, and e-mailing parents would create greater parent involvement, but they did not necessarily practice these beliefs.

Likewise, when asked about practices and beliefs about providing information about libraries, book clubs, and educational opportunities to parents, specifically in using a newsletter, holding a parent conference, providing interactive homework, providing a special information sheet, using a teacher webpage, and e-mailing parents, there was a statistically significant difference in teachers' and administrators' beliefs about good parent involvement and their practice of those beliefs in the school or classroom. When asked about practices and beliefs about providing parents with projects to help reinforce class work, there was a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices in the following areas: holding student and parent information sessions, hosting science fairs, providing home learning packets, hosting other academic fairs, and hosting a family math and/or reading night. Although teachers and administrators believed parent involvement would improve by offering a range of parent projects, they did not implement the projects.

When asked about practices and beliefs about notifying parents of academic difficulty, there was once again a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices. Teachers and administrators have fairly strong beliefs about using written progress reports, holding individual conferences and telephone conferences, using student and parent contracts, and meeting with parents, but their practices do not support these beliefs. Teachers and administrators do not report having strong beliefs or practices in regards to using teacher web pages and/or e-mail to parents regarding academic difficulty. When asked about practices and beliefs in relation to providing suggestions to parents to prevent failure, there was a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices in all areas.

Discussion

This study is unique from many other studies regarding parent involvement because it involves teachers and administrators within an urban school district in Pennsylvania who took part in a statewide parent involvement initiative during the 2004-2005 school year. Additionally, it addresses the lack of family involvement at the middle and high school levels (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). This study fills a gap in the existing research by focusing on parent involvement within elementary, middle, and high school settings. Research must be conducted to chart the progress of the parental involvement movement (Kirschenbaum, 2001). Educators often view families within inner-city schools in terms of deficiencies; therefore, positive views and attitudes must replace negative beliefs (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Recruiting efforts may be necessary in order to gain parent volunteers, especially fathers and parents of middle and

high school students (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; DiCamillo, 2001; Hiatt-Michael; Schulte, 2002). Family-like schools must be fostered where children are aware of high expectations and common messages from the significant adults who have an impact on their lives (Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Ultimately, educators and administrators must be knowledgeable of parent involvement practices in order to create successful partnerships with families. "Schools are not the only institutions in society in which teaching and learning occur. The family is a critical institution in this regard, and parents are teachers of their children" (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, p. 280). Beliefs and professional experiences shape teaching practices (Graue & Brown, 2003). Teacher preparation programs must reform their courses and integrate field experiences and internships to enhance preservice teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills regarding school-family-community partnerships (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Graue & Brown; Greenwood & Hickman; Kirschenbaum, 2001; Young & Hite, 1994). Parent involvement coursework and professional experiences for educators are scarce (Greenwood & Hickman; Young & Hite). When courses are offered, they typically only emphasize "traditional" forms of parent involvement, such as conferencing. Universities and colleges must consider if parent involvement should be taught in separate courses or be infused directly into coursework. In regard to parent involvement, Greenwood & Hickman give 10 recommendations for teacher education, which include: (1) emphasize a research- and practice-based rationale; (2) teach excellent techniques to involve parents in their children's education; (3) promote teachers' self-efficacy; (4) tailor coursework to meet the needs of teachers, based upon grade level taught and inservice versus preservice training; (5) discuss various types of parent involvement – traditional to non-traditional practices; (6) provide opportunities for preservice teacher field experiences working with parents; (7) provide ongoing inservice training to school districts to foster home-school connections; (8) examine whether state Praxis exams measure preservice teachers' professional knowledge on parent involvement; (9) universities and colleges should network with professional organizations; and (10) parent involvement research should be encouraged. District administrators, unions, and school boards must support partnerships with families through appropriate funding, resources, and on-going professional development (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994; Kirschenbaum). Professionals who are well prepared to work with students and families alike develop greater self-efficacy (Kirschenbaum).

Greenwood and Hickman (1991) recommend school system-level programming to coordinate parent involvement so teachers do not feel overwhelmed. In collaboration with teachers and administrators, school psychologists (Pelco et al., 2000) and/or ombudsmen could foster positive family-school-community

partnerships. Four broad features are suggested for the implementation of effective parent involvement programs (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004). First, establish proactive programs to foster positive interactions with parents at the beginning of the school year. Second, focus on a 180-day plan which entails developing handouts for parents, offering parents a variety of opportunities to become actively involved, and taking families' interests into account while helping them plan for their children's transition into upcoming grade levels. Third, schools should inform parents of classroom management and instructional activities. Fourth, accommodations must be made to meet the needs of families of diverse backgrounds. Practical strategies include: providing parents with information regarding parenting skills and child development; assisting families with increased knowledge of community resources (e.g., Internet access and suggesting significant websites); supporting teachers' efforts to plan optimal parent-teacher conferences (e.g., inclusion of extended family members, caregivers, and the students themselves); and participating in home visits to build partnerships between children's home and school environments (Pelco et al., 2000). Greenwood and Hickman posit that teachers also play a vital role in selecting, planning, and developing materials for home learning. In addition, teachers must work with parents to explain, monitor, and evaluate the activities. Parent programs/workshops should be offered, and teachers may either play a direct role, conducting the workshop, or an indirect role, motivating parents to attend. Parents should be encouraged to partake in school governance activities, such as advisory committees (Greenwood & Hickman). When parents are invited to participate in their children's education, strong bonds can be made between home and school.

Schools must recognize and respect families' cultural and socioeconomic differences (Garcia, 2004; Griffith, 1998). Events and activities sponsored by the school must be structured and scheduled to fit the parents' needs (e.g., provide transportation and child care, incorporate the parents' sociocultural values) in order to welcome and encourage their involvement (Griffith). It must also be considered whether school boards exert a positive influence on administrators to incorporate parent involvement programs (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994). Additionally, the effect of student mobility on parents' relations to the school should be studied (Griffith). In order to help parents of older children assist with learning at home, parent "refresher" courses dealing with various subjects could be offered by schools.

School size generally affects parent involvement, with smaller schools including more involvement (Griffith, 1998). Baron and Byrne (1997) describe "social loafing" or a lack of motivation among staff and parents that often transpires within large rather than small schools (pp. 444-448). In order to alleviate

this problem, restructuring schools to create small schools within larger schools is recommended in order to foster cohesiveness and greater parent involvement (Garcia, 2004).

Various obstacles regarding parent involvement have been identified (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some of the obstacles include: insufficient teacher education related to parent involvement management, limited time constraints of parents and teachers, parents' and teachers' diverse goals for children, parents' lack of knowledge to serve as a classroom volunteer or advisory committee member, feeling a lack of power to have an influence in a school setting, and a lack of health (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Greenwood & Hickman). Some of these obstacles may be eradicated through school and state leadership, such as providing parent involvement coordinators. In addition, teachers' attitudes, skills, and knowledge may also be considered barriers (Greenwood & Hickman). In order to minimize and alleviate barriers, parent involvement practices, along with teachers' and administrators' self-efficacy, should be carefully examined to support children's education.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings in this study help broaden the scope of research on parent involvement, several limitations to the research exist. First, this study is limited to examining certain variables of teacher and administrator practices and beliefs about parent involvement. The study does not measure other variables that may also impact teacher beliefs about parent involvement. Secondly, this study does not indicate the district and school factors that may limit teachers' and administrators' abilities to implement into practice certain parent involvement strategies. For example, as stated in the review of research section of this study, there was a mismatch between many beliefs and practices of parent involvement. Certain environmental factors may impede these practices. One such instance was the use of a teacher webpage as a way to be involved with parents; this capacity may be limited depending on the district and school technological capabilities and policies. Third, this study is also limited by its sample, which includes teachers and administrators in one urban school district in southwestern Pennsylvania. The sample is also limited by the number of participants responding to each question. A larger representative population would provide a more accurate account of teacher and administrator beliefs and practices about parent involvement. Fourth, the survey was only offered to teachers and administrators in an electronic version. The potential participants may have felt unwilling to participate if they maintained low self-efficacy regarding technology. Technical difficulties may also have affected participation.

Directions for Future Research

Various recommendations for future research should be considered. Future studies should focus on the early years, which are critical to children's development. More research on parent education programs for infants and toddlers is needed (DiCamillo, 2001). In addition, families, teachers, and administrators who resist parent involvement should be studied to better understand how to overcome barriers to successful partnerships. Future research should include the following: types of useful home learning activities for children at various grade levels; efficient training for parent tutors; attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators; beneficial roles of parents during home learning activities; helping parents tailor home learning to meet their child's individual needs; the teacher's role regarding various types of parent involvement; and designing carefully constructed assignments to promote positive parent-child interactions and academic support (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Research on school discipline, student behavior, family-school-community activities, and family responses is needed as well (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). It is also recommended that parents' reports and views regarding involvement be studied (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of various parent involvement programs, future studies must carefully implement rigorous research methods before sound conclusions can be made (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodrieguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Research should focus on the interrelationships among the following variables: parental satisfaction of their children's schools, empowerment of parents, school climate, and the extent to which schools share information with parents. In addition, environmental and contextual features of schools have not been adequately studied (Griffith, 1998). Cochran and Dean (1991) describe the imperative to include teachers and parents in research, as their voices are necessary to forge true partnerships. Despite the many positive aspects of parent involvement, there have been inconsistencies in the findings that link parent involvement with student achievement (Kyriakides, 2005). Therefore, future studies should also continue to measure teachers' perceptions rather than merely student or parent direct reports. Finally, research in urban areas at the elementary, middle, and high school levels is recommended.

Conclusion

Institutional changes and allocated resources through the schools must be considered for long-term parent involvement goals (Cochran & Dean, 1991). As evidenced by this study, it is clear that institutional support is needed to

support parent involvement initiatives. This study presents evidence that both teachers and administrators have strong beliefs regarding parental involvement in the educational system. However, their practices do not necessarily match their beliefs. For that reason, teachers need clear direction from building level administrators, and those administrators need direction from central office administrators regarding parent involvement best practices. Without clear direction and support, parent involvement programs will not succeed.

However, when parent programs based upon the six national standards for parent/family involvement are combined with high teacher and administrator self-efficacy as well as institutional support, gains can be made in parental involvement efforts. Schools must focus on and utilize families' strengths to support involvement. It is the schools' responsibility to welcome and encourage parental support and involvement in order to create beneficial partnerships.

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The Bridge is Built: The Role of Local Teachers in an Urban Elementary School

Wayne A. Reed

Abstract

This article documents the contribution of local elementary teachers and examines the teachers' role as a conduit between an urban school and its community. Based on participant observation and interviews with local teachers and parents, the research considers the teachers' bridging position as professional practitioners and community constituents and highlights the way their unique location manifests itself in the school and surrounding neighborhood. By looking at the teachers' work through the theoretical lens of social capital, the author makes the case that local practitioners are an essential resource in the effort to build effective collaborations between schools and the neighborhoods they serve.

Key Words: school-community relations, local teachers, community teaching, social capital, parental engagement, community development, low-income schools, outreach, families, family involvement, parents, urban elementary school, educators, roles

Introduction

Almost every morning of the academic year, Ms. Goodman, a middle-aged African American woman, sits inside the main door of an elementary school located in a low-income urban neighborhood. After the bell rings to signal the start of the day, she fulfills her role by spending half an hour taking down the

names of the children who arrive late. The school has over 1,000 children, and depending on the time of year and the weather conditions, "Ms. G" may document over 50 students. As children shuffle through the door, she greets them and briefly speaks to each one before they head to their classrooms. Sometimes her words are soothing, such as "Don't worry, honey, you're late, calm down, it's going to be okay." Other times she is more demanding: "This is your second lateness this week. Did you tell your mother I said you can't keep being late?" After witnessing Ms. G in action over a period of weeks, I come to an important realization – no matter *which* children are late she recognizes almost every one and calls them by name. When I ask her about this, she shrugs it off: "But, I know almost every child in this school."

Ms. Goodman and her morning ritual represent what I understand to be a fundamental resource in reforming urban schools – that is, a localized knowledge of students and families and a network of relationships with community constituents. As a paraprofessional who lives in the vicinity of the school, Ms. Goodman embodies the kind of commitment to and a particularized understanding of the local context that fosters trust and mutual accountability – critical factors in transforming the dynamic between schools and their communities.

In recent years, an increasing number of urban educators are calling for a community-oriented approach to school reform (Anyon, 2005; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001; Warren, 2005). These calls are in response to the lack of cohesion and collaboration that traditionally exists between schools and low-income urban neighborhoods (Cahill, 1996; Giles, 1998; Reed, 2004). The premise of those who support community oriented approaches is that urban schools cannot function in isolation from the neighborhoods they serve; effective schooling must be woven into the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual fabric of the community.

What is striking about these discussions is that they rarely account for an existing connection between urban schools and their communities, namely, the practitioners with residential histories in the school's neighborhood. Most low-income urban schools have a small cohort of teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff which live nearby or, if they no longer live in the community, were raised there and maintain contact with friends, former neighbors, and relatives in the area. By being an integral part of the school's social and cultural context, these practitioners have a unique understanding of the school's relationship to the neighborhood. As professional practitioners they are knowledgeable of the school's routines, culture, and institutional functioning, and as constituents of the community they understand the difficulties that students, parents, and other local residents face in brokering meaningful engagement with the school. Many are parents themselves and understand first-hand the challenge of raising

children in the neighborhood. They usually share common racial, ethnic, and cultural identities with many of the children and families; their location and participation in the community give them a shared local identity as well. While educators, school administrators, and educational policymakers ponder the obstacles to building healthy, energized collaborations between urban schools and low-income communities, local practitioners are already making the kinds of daily connections to children and families that are the foundation on which school-community partnerships can be constructed.

My research over the past five years indicates that the contribution of local teachers is an important, often unacknowledged, and generally underdeveloped human resource in low-income urban contexts. In what follows, I argue that the position of local teachers in the community – their network of relationships and their particularized knowledge of the school's social and cultural context – serve as a vital link between school and neighborhood. I conclude the article by suggesting ways that school administrators and practitioners might invest in the resource provided by local teachers with a view toward expanding the school's connections to its community.

Background

My interest in local teachers emerged over the past decade, a period when I worked for six years in adult education before taking my current position as a teacher educator at a public university. The public schools where I currently place my student teachers are in the same neighborhood where, prior to joining the college faculty, I worked on community development and adult education projects. Those projects brought me into the neighborhood on a daily basis, introduced me to community stakeholders, blessed me with some important relationships, and offered me some insight into the estrangement that many low-income families experience with their local public schools. It was also an important time for me personally and professionally. Working five days a week as a middle-class White man among low-income and working-class women and men of color deeply altered the way I began to see my social, cultural, and political position in relation to urban communities.

From the beginning of this investigation, my interest has been to understand the contribution of local teachers in low-income urban schools[1]. When I entered the public schools in the community where this research was conducted, I observed schools through the lens of my prior experiences as an adult educator in the community but outside the purview of public schooling. Having come to understand the gap between school and neighborhood from the community's vantage point, my entrance into the schools raised questions for

me about the role being played by the teachers who function in the dual role of community constituent and professional practitioner. How does being a local teacher influence a teacher's practice, particularly a teacher's engagement with students and families? What particular insights and knowledge do local teachers bring to their practice that might contribute to their ability to work more effectively with students than their non-local counterparts? How do local teachers negotiate the hostility that often characterizes the relationship between schools and low-income communities?

Theoretical Framework

My discussion of local teachers in urban schools is framed by the concept of social capital. I find social capital to be a helpful tool in describing and analyzing the contribution of local teachers in low-income urban schools because the teachers' network of relationships with local parents, local residents, and community stakeholders is a foundational resource on which schools can build a partnership with the community. Social capital is "fundamentally about relationships" (Warren, 2005, p.137), and in this article the teachers' network of relationships is understood to be one of the primary assets they bring to their practice. In this study, I am defining social capital as "the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties" (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003, p. 323.) By locating my research in the realm of social capital, I argue that the local teachers' network of relationships is a valuable commodity, one that urban schools can invest in as they bridge the gap that has historically separated schools from the low-income neighborhoods they serve. I am also proposing that the ethnic identities, cultural background, and life experiences of local teachers equip them to establish ties with parents and other local residents, thus strengthening the school's ties to the community. Ultimately, this research points to the need for urban schools to invest in the social capital of local teachers, to create policies and practices that draw on the resources of local teachers, and to develop initiatives that recruit and prepare more local teachers for urban schools.

Methodology

This research is based on interviews with eleven local teachers, surveys with thirteen parents, interviews with five parents, and participant observations in one elementary school over a three-year period. The eleven local teachers, all women, practice in the same school and live (or have lived) in their school's

neighborhood for extended periods of time; ten of them resided in the community for more than a decade. Five of the local teachers were raised in the neighborhood. Six of the teachers are current neighborhood residents and, even though the other five now live outside the school's immediate vicinity, they maintain a regular presence in the area through their ties to friends and family. The teachers for the research were selected on the basis of their residential history in the community.

The thirteen parents who participated in the research are local residents whose children are enrolled in the school. The extent of the parents' involvement in school activities varies considerably: five of the parents are active participants in the parent-teacher association and volunteer regularly as classroom aides. The remainder occasionally attends parent-teacher conferences but limit their school involvement because of their commitments to jobs or continuing education. The parents whom I engaged in this research were invited to complete a survey at the conclusion of an open forum I conducted for parents at the school. From the pool of parents who completed the survey I was able to identify, with the assistance of the school's parent coordinator, five parents who were willing to be interviewed. The experience of local teachers is the focal point of the research; I drew on the voices of parents to substantiate and clarify the data gathered from the teachers.

The research was collected in a low-income urban elementary school of 1,100 students. The neighborhood under consideration is a twelve block square within about one-half mile of the school. It is situated in a low-income section of one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas. The area was red-lined by bankers and real estate agents in the 1960's and 1970's, a period in which hundreds of buildings were vacated or burned, the social fabric of the neighborhood unraveled, and incidents of violent crime increased markedly. The community is currently experiencing an economic upturn, although the per capita income remains 50% below the national average. The area continues to be highlighted in the media as the location of violent crime and is often described by other city residents as a "no-go" area. Approximately half the residents in the neighborhood identify themselves as Black, the majority being African American, some with family ties to the Caribbean. About 40% of the neighborhood is Latino, mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican. A smaller but growing segment of the local population are recent immigrants from Bangladesh. The teachers and parents who participated in this research reflect the ethnic diversity of the community.

Findings

Teachers in the Community

Local teachers have a different relationship to the community than the other educators in the school where they practice because of their residential history in the neighborhood. Their ties to the community give them a particularized knowledge of the school's social and cultural context. Local teachers know parents, residents, shopkeepers, day care providers, after-school staff, and are acquainted with local institutions, for example, churches, mosques, health care facilities, social service groups, not-for-profit organizations, shopping areas, and so forth. They have an established network of friends and family members and, in many cases, are involved in civic and religious institutions.

By circulating in the area near the school, local teachers encounter students and their families on the street, at the supermarket, public library, or corner bodega. All of the teachers in this study report interactions with children and families outside of the school. The extent of these encounters appears to vary, depending on the teachers' lifestyle, for example, whether they walk or drive; their participation in social, cultural, or religious activities; and their openness to making themselves available beyond the regular school day. Several of the teachers seem energized by seeing students and families outside of their regular working hours. One teacher describes it this way: "When I go to the supermarket, I see children from the school, or when I just go outside for a walk. The other day I went shopping and I decided to count. I saw eight students within an hour!" Another teacher says, "When I sit outside in the summer, the children ride their bikes by to wave at me and shout hello. They love stopping and talking to my daughter; it's like they want to know what their teacher's family is like."

A striking element of the teachers' presence in the community is the manner in which they function in their professional role outside of the school day. For example, several of the teachers make home visits. One teacher tutors students in her home. In some cases, teachers stop by a child's home when a child has been excessively absent and phone communication has not been effective. One teacher reports, "I call by my students' houses on the way to or from work. Sometimes a student would be truant or habitually late or absent. I call by their house to check on them." On other occasions the teacher visits a child to assist with an aspect of the child's academic work. One teacher describes the situation like this:

> Let's say the child was having trouble in the classroom. I would go to their home and try to give them a little extra help. I'd speak to their

> mom and say that so-and-so was having a little trouble with math today, is there a time I can come by and work with him because I'm afraid he's falling behind?

Although the data do not suggest that all local teachers make home visits or that visits occur on a regular basis, the ones that are made suggest an important connection between teachers and the lives of their students beyond the walls of the school. While this research cannot verify that local teachers make home visits more than the other practitioners in the school, my preliminary investigation indicates that home visits by non-local teachers are quite rare, if they occur at all.

Several of the local teachers interviewed report attending significant events in the lives of their students. A fifth grade teacher indicates that she makes an effort to be at students' sports events, dance recitals, and special religious activities. Another teacher reports her attendance at a cookout to celebrate an important occasion for the family of one of her students. Other teachers speak of their awareness of important events in students' lives because of their ongoing communication with neighborhood residents; they regularly acknowledge these occasions in their classrooms. The teachers' proximity to students and their families allows for a kind of local knowledge that is attained by living in the vicinity.

Parents' Perspectives of Local Teachers

It comes as no surprise that the teachers' presence in the daily life of the neighborhood receives special notice by children and parents. One mother reports her children's excitement at spotting one of the local teachers while the family is out and about in the neighborhood:

> Sometimes when my sons and I are out shopping we see one of the teachers. We've seen them at the library once and at the grocery store. My kids always notice them before I do. My oldest son, he gets all excited, "There go a teacher, Mommy." Then, my littlest one gets all jealous because he don't be knowin' the teachers that well.

It's difficult to fully measure what it means to children and their families to see their teachers in the neighborhood; my experience as a community educator suggests that the significance of these encounters should not be underestimated. Children in low-income urban neighborhoods receive regular messages via the media, the streets, and even from some of their more unenlightened teachers, that the place they call home is substandard. In such a climate, the sighting of a school teacher elevates both the status of community and the school. Children see educational attainment as a possibility because someone

from their own world has "made it." As one of the local teachers in this study said, "The kids know that I live around here. They know I grew up with some of their mothers. I say to them, 'If I can make it, if I can graduate from college, then you can too.'"

Unlike parents in middle- and upper-income neighborhoods, low-income parents have few, if any, professional educators in their social and familial network. One reason many urban parents have difficulty connecting to their child's teacher may be because they lack the cultural capital that comes from social interactions with professional educators in other settings. Less than a third of low-income urban parents know a teacher in a context outside of a school (Horvat et al., 2003). With this in view, the possibility afforded by local teachers' presence in the community, the chance for them to interact with students and families in their daily lives, becomes all the more important.

Local teachers are aware that their presence in the community is significant in the eyes of community residents. The most common word used to describe their credibility in the neighborhood is "respect." Respect from the children stems from the fact that children view local teachers as a part of their lives outside of the school building. One local teacher describes it like this, "Because they know I'm in the neighborhood, I get the sense that they're saying, 'I'm gonna respect her because she's one of us.'" Another teacher said, "When I meet children and their parents at the laundry or supermarket, they give me tremendous respect. It's like I have some sort of prestige or something. I'm always recognized for being a teacher."

The local teachers' credibility with parents and other residents comes from their status as professionals and the fact that the teachers stayed in the neighborhood when their level of income could have taken them elsewhere. This idea is articulated by the Puerto Rican teacher when she says:

> The fact that I'm a Hispanic teacher, I live in the community, I work in the community, puts me in a different place with parents. They see me as a professional and someone who made something of herself and that I've chosen to give back to my community. As one parent told me, "You haven't abandoned your people."

This reference to abandonment speaks volumes to the perspective of many inner city residents, particularly parents who are struggling, often against the odds, to raise their families in trying economic and social conditions. Walking the streets or entering some of the homes in the community, it is easy to see the evidence for the community's sense of being abandoned – streets with potholes the size of cars, buildings in decay, unkempt vacant lots. Given this reality, parents are aware and appreciative of the presence of local teachers, since they know the teachers are choosing to stay connected to the area.

Local Teachers in Context

By contrast, community constituents are also conscious of the practitioners who reside outside the neighborhood and commute to the school. While the presence of local teachers is acknowledged and affirmed by the community, many of the "commuter teachers" in my research are noted for their lack of presence in the neighborhood. When the topic of teachers' absence is mentioned with neighborhood residents, it is often accompanied with tones of anger and frustration. This emotional reaction stems from a complex array of factors, including the fact that low-income urbanites, almost all people of color, are tired of racially based stereotyping of their neighborhoods by some of the non-local teachers, most of whom are White and living in more affluent neighborhoods. Low-income residents are quick to differentiate between the practitioners they perceive as having solidarity with them and those that disregard them and the challenges they face in raising a family in a low-income context. In the minds of local residents, being physically present in the community is a fundamental indicator of whether someone from outside the community is "with us" or not. With this in view, local teachers and parents are also quick to identify the fact that significant numbers of teachers avoid being present in the neighborhood. One parent refers to the commuter teachers in this way:

> Some of the teachers don't know anything about our neighborhood. They are working in the neighborhood forever, but they don't even know the streets. You say, "That child lives on so and so street," and they don't even know what you're talking about. A teacher who knows the places around the school can walk down the street to talk to the parents to see why a child is always absent. A lot of teachers don't do that because they're scared of the neighborhood. I say, "If you're too scared of the neighborhood, you don't need to be working in the neighborhood."

From a local resident's vantage point, commuter teachers demonstrate their disdain for the area around the school by not maintaining a presence there, even though the reasons for this absence may be fear and anxiety for their own personal safety. The perception that many of the school's teachers are not on the side of the local residents is a fundamental contributor to the gap between school and community. The fact that local teachers are a daily presence in a neighborhood, a place where so many of the school's teachers choose not to go, creates a dichotomy in the minds of parents and local residents. There is a strong dichotomy of "us" versus "them" exhibited in my data set.

Importantly, the research suggests that, in addition to the local teachers, several other teachers in the school, including commuter teachers, are identified by community constituents as standing in solidarity with them and their

children. Although the parents I interviewed regarded only a small number of non-local teachers in this way, I intend to pursue the practices of these teachers in future research.

Community residents attribute the suburban teachers' lack of presence in the neighborhood as an instance of racial and class discrimination. From the vantage point of local teachers and parents, one of the main reasons that many White teachers and administrators drive in and out of the neighborhood and generally avoid the community is because the neighborhood demographic is primarily low-income people of color. One local Caribbean American teacher describes the behavior of some of her White colleagues like this:

> They bring their lunch; they stay in the school until the end of the day, then they jump in their car and go home. That is what they do. You will never see them strolling up and down the street. When they're in the teachers' lounge, they are always making comparisons, comparing children in their community with our children. It's very, very piercing. They don't care about the social issues involved. They are not committed to this school or this neighborhood. The children can feel it. It's really a racial issue. But none of us are fooled – people in the community talk about these teachers and their White ideals; they know these teachers don't really care about the kids. People in the community see right through it, people see that they are here to promote their own careers on the backs of Black children.

The statements of this local teacher are a stark depiction of a polarization between White suburban teachers and low-income communities of color, an idea that is noted elsewhere (Lareau, 1991; Winters, 1993). This teacher's sentiments speak to the deep-seated animosity that permeates relationships between the community and many of the educators who are teaching the community's children. It is impossible to fully understand the important position of local teachers in the school without understanding the prevailing sense of estrangement in low-income communities of color, particularly the way parents and local residents experience alienation from many of the practitioners teaching the community's children.

The problematic relationship between low-income communities and public schools is well documented in the literature (Cahill, 1996; Giles, 1998; Good et al., 1997; Lawson, 2003; Reed, 2004; Warren, 2005) and can be explained by a complex array of causal factors including institutional racism, class discrimination, and cultural hegemony (Anyon, 1995; Lareau, 2003; Winters, 1993). The position that local teachers play in bridging this divide occurs in the context of an institutional culture that often insulates the school from its surrounding neighborhood, a culture which suggests that what goes on outside of

the school is generally "bad" and counterproductive to the "good" taking place inside the school. As Hyland and Meacham note, many practitioners in urban schools "view the families and home communities of their students as primary obstacles to their students' success and therefore maintain a striking social distance from families and community members" (2004, p. 116). This is in direct contrast to the research which indicates that almost all parents, regardless of ethnicity or economic status, want their children to succeed in school and are willing to make changes to help them do well (Bouffard & Weiss, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). It is against this backdrop, the alienation of parents by many practitioners, that the significance of local teachers is fully appreciated, the community's bond with local teachers makes sense, and the role of local teacher as a bridge from community to school becomes visible.

Local Teachers as a Bridge for School and Community

Having considered the local teachers' position in the neighborhood, the social network they have there, and the community's disposition toward many non-local teachers, I turn my attention to the ways in which local teachers provide community residents with a connection to the school that they would not otherwise have. How does the presence of local teachers inside the school provide parents and other residents with a way to traverse the divisions between school and community? More specifically, how does a local teacher's dual role as community member and professional practitioner create a conduit for communication and advocacy on behalf of local children?

Local teachers enter classrooms with a network of local relationships, cultural knowledge of students and families, and a contextualized understanding of the neighborhood and what it means to live there. This includes knowledge of the challenges associated with life in the area surrounding the school. In addition to this community knowledge, local teachers are professional practitioners and, as such, have knowledge of the school's culture and how to negotiate the school's policies and procedures. They also hold professional and collegial ties to the faculty and administrators in the school. Because they are members of two constituencies, the community and the school, local teachers have insight into the challenges parents face when they need to access the school as an institution, and they have the social capital to refer parents to various resources in the school.

In my research, I note numerous instances of local teachers drawing on their particularized knowledge to understand and advocate for students and families. Given the teachers' knowledge of and appreciation for the community and the alienation historically felt by that community, it is not surprising to find that parents ask these teachers for assistance. A common situation occurs when

parents need information relevant to their child and they are either intimidated by the culture of the school or unsure how to negotiate the school system's bureaucracy. Local teachers are familiar with the parents' sense of intimidation; one teacher describes it like this:

> Parents are fearful of coming into the school. Many of them have no formal education. They are afraid that words will be spoken that they don't understand and they'll look bad in front of the teachers and principals and their own children. They're afraid their lack of education will show.

Significantly, this local teacher is aware not only of the parents' anxiety, but also that lack of education is a key contributor to the parents' fear. It has previously been established that differences in educational attainment between teachers and low-income parents are a major factor in the lack of parental engagement in urban schools (Reed, 2004). In this research, the local teachers' awareness of the role of educational differences appears to be a major reason for the local teachers' successful engagement of parents.

In addition to differences in educational attainment, the local teachers in my research cite language barriers as an obstacle which keeps parents away from the school. One local teacher says it this way:

> A lot of parents are reluctant to come into the school, especially immigrant parents who are not proficient in English. They tend to be hesitant. But, when they find out where I live, that I live nearby, they seem to become more confident, as if they're saying to themselves, "I know this teacher, I've seen her around, and I can go to her to get help if I have to."

In addition to this local teacher's ability to identify language issues, what I find particularly striking here is the teacher's awareness that her presence as a local resident in the neighborhood offers parents a welcoming, safe contact in the school. This connection between teacher and parents occurs despite the fact that the local teacher is an English speaker and has her own limitations in communicating with the parents. In this case, it appears that the ties they share as community residents helps to mediate their language differences.

Other local teachers report similar examples of community constituents approaching them for assistance. One local practitioner received a call from a parent seeking advice prior to her son's suspension hearing. The teacher had never met the parent before but someone in the neighborhood suggested the parent call the teacher because "she'll know what to do." Another local teacher cites examples of parents coming to her when they needed government entitlement documents from the school's office. The local teacher describes the situation like this:

> A lot of parents have so much on them, just working and trying to survive. Some parents don't even have a job. They are on public assistance and they have to march into the principal's office to get a letter to prove their child's in school. It's embarrassing. Sometimes they come to me and ask if I can take care of this for them.

In this instance, the parents are drawing on the cultural capital of this local teacher, and the teacher works with the parents to circumvent the school's protocol. The teacher's desire to help the parents save face is a reflection of the local teacher's particularized knowledge of what it means to be a low-income parent of color in a school culture that is predominantly White, educated, and middle class. It is also a testimony to the teacher's commitment to her people, people from her community, in opposition to the dominant culture of the school.

Teachers as Advocates for Community Access to Schools

Local teachers are often called upon to negotiate the tension between their dual role as professional practitioners and community constituents. In my research, an issue that illustrates this negotiation most clearly is the local teachers' response to the school's policies on parental presence in the classroom. As with all schools in the city's system, parents have limited access to the school building, and they are rarely permitted to enter into their child's classroom. In spite of these requirements and the security considerations they imply, local teachers believe that the school's posture on the accessibility of parents to the school building sends an important signal that parents are not welcome. Parents have no access to the classrooms during the course of the regular school day and are only free to enter into the classrooms during the four open houses held each year. One of the community teachers in this study reported being "called on the carpet" by the principal for letting parents come into her classroom. The teacher reported feeling caught in a bind between the parents, some of whom she has known all of her life, and the school's administration, which reprimanded her for allowing parents into the classroom.

This desire to allow parents greater presence in the school was verbalized by several of the teachers in the study and described by one teacher as follows:

> I'd love it if the parents could walk their child to the door of my room, give their kids that extra kiss and say "have a nice day." I think it would make a world of difference. Then the parents would feel invited into the school. They should be able to come into their child's class, not just on open house night or for parent-teacher conferences, but every day. I would like them to come in and watch; maybe they can see something that I'm doing and they can implement it with their child at home.

This welcoming attitude toward parents in classrooms stands in stark contrast to the school's policy which seems to maintain barriers between the school and the surrounding neighborhood and to keep parents at a distance, on the outside of the daily functioning of the school.

The local teachers' solidarity with the community is also evidenced in the loyalty they express to their students and families. The community teachers' sense of ownership for the children of the neighborhood contributes to the parents and local residents looking to these teachers' as allies in the school. Eight of the eleven teachers interviewed used familial language to describe their students, referring to them as "my children" and identifying themselves as a second mother. This self-identification by practitioners as second mother is consistent with the literature on urban teachers of color (Cooper, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001). As one local teacher says,

> I don't see my students any different than my own children. I always believe that I am going to treat my students the way I would want another teacher to treat mine…so I don't see them any differently. In fact, the children in my classroom sometimes say, "Mrs. M doesn't have two children. She has thirty-two children."

Conclusion

Although local teachers are a significant resource in urban schools and play a significant role in bridging the gap between schools and communities, their potential is usually unrecognized by school administrators or other practitioners. In fact, the access they provide to parents and the importance of their position in the neighborhood is often minimized by the school's culture. On a daily basis, these teachers make the kinds of connections to parents and local constituents that could become a platform for meaningful school-community collaboration. Local teachers have a particularized knowledge of the school's social and cultural context, knowledge that could be drawn on to establish more effective educational practices with students and families. However, the depth and breadth of their contribution is often impeded by the prevailing ideology of most urban schools, an unspoken set of principles that pathologize low-income communities of color.

The potential of local teachers is largely undermined by the prevailing culture of urban schools, a culture that characterizes the community as deficient, needy, and hopeless, and positions the school as a sanctuary of goodness, a safe haven where students come to free themselves from the negativity of their neighborhood. In such a context, the professional contribution of local teachers may be affirmed, but the community connections, cultural knowledge,

social ties, and historical understanding of the students and families which make these teachers so effective are barely utilized. Over half of the teachers in this study are lead teachers and are selected to mentor newer faculty and to provide professional development training. Although valued as professionals, the teachers' role as liaison to the community is rarely, if ever, acknowledged or affirmed. Due to the climate of the school, the teachers tend to keep the community aspects of their identity and practice on the down-low; they engage parents and other residents in quiet, unassuming ways, below the radar screen of the principal or their suburban-dwelling counterparts.

This lack of acknowledgement of local teachers is problematic because their dual role often calls them to additional service; their workload is usually greater than their non-local counterparts because, in addition to their regular duties, they are called upon to assist students and families because of their community connections. Because of their knowledge of the neighborhood and their history of relationships with students and families, they also tend to identify with those they serve, to be invested in the successes and failures of students, and closely involved with the problems of families. At times the responsibilities of their dual role can be overwhelming, as one local teacher put it, "Sometimes parents come to me; they ask me to handle something for them. Or they want to tell me about their problems. They open up to me like you wouldn't believe. At the end of the day, I find it can all get to be too much."

In seeking to address the gap between low-income communities and urban schools, educators, administrators, and policymakers can begin by identifying and celebrating the contribution of local practitioners and by implementing strategies that support their work. Educators, especially school leaders, can provide spaces for local teachers to give voice to their knowledge and understanding of the community and offer their perspectives on the way the school engages the neighborhood. My experience is that school context has so suppressed the unique position of local teachers that the teachers themselves need to initially engage in a dialogue with each other, a dialogue that allows them to validate and articulate the resources they bring to their practice. Once the local teachers are more fully conscious of their role as bridges between school and community, they are in a stronger position to share their community knowledge within the school and, as a result, to be more fully acknowledged by the school as a whole.

In the past 20 years or so, sociologists and urban planners have come to approach distressed neighborhoods with asset-based planning (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Similarly, those committed to contradicting the detachment of public schools from their communities can celebrate the contribution of local teachers and invest in the social capital they bring to schools. Rather than

buying into the deficit thinking that characterizes the gap as too wide to cross, the contribution of local practitioners can be identified as an existing bridge leading to the creation of stronger, healthier school-community relationships.

Endnotes

[1]This work is significantly influenced by Peter Murrell's description of community teachers and his articulation of the process that leads community teachers to engage in "accomplished practice" (Murrell, 2001). In this paper, I focus on elementary practitioners who have residential histories in their school's surrounding neighborhood. In most cases, the teachers under consideration here fit Murrell's definition of a community teacher. I am using the descriptor *local teacher* to emphasize the teachers' position between school and community rather than the teachers' level of accomplishment as a classroom practitioner.

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Spirituality and Respect: Study of a Model School-Church-Community Collaboration

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Abstract

This interpretive case study focused upon the outcomes of a 14-year collaboration between a PreK-4 elementary school serving a high percentage of low-income students and a church located in the same urban neighborhood. The purposes of the investigation were to (1) perform a qualitative study that identified central themes underlying this successful collaboration; (2) effectively integrate the themes into a coherent program theory that characterizes the efforts by stakeholders to impact poverty; and (3) use emerging theory to develop a framework to be adapted by other organizations including – but not restricted to – churches, to effectively address issues of poverty within their communities. Results revealed key aspects of an emerging program theory based upon central themes of respect and spirituality. Collaborative leadership, renewed community, and poverty resources grew from those central themes to produce multiple program outcomes, including: moral purpose, catalytic action, sustainability, collaborative relationships, commitment, educational salience, social knowledge, and poverty understanding and advocacy. These outcomes together characterized the emerging program theory that, while unique to this program, was consistent with much of the literature addressing successful community collaborations designed to impact and cope with poverty. Schools and other community organizations are encouraged to look at this successful collaboration for the building blocks for collaborative program foundations, but also cautioned that many essential ingredients will emerge from the culture that is unique within their school community.

Key Words: collaborative education programs, school community, churches, spirituality, case study, spirituality, respect, faith-based organizations, model

Introduction

For the past 14 years, a church congregation located in a mid-sized, Midwest city, population 112,936 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), has maintained a grassroots collaboration with an elementary school located in their urban neighborhood. Housed in a building over 100 years old, the school struggles to provide the necessary resources to students, the majority of whom live in poverty. On any given day, however, a visitor/researcher arriving at the school finds an old building with students, parents, members of the church, and teachers in an atmosphere of cooperation and respect. A member of the congregation put it this way, "We are in a relationship with the school. Our mission is not to save the school but to love and care for the people, improve their lives, and improve the neighborhood."

Student demographics in the school reveal some interesting patterns. Low income/poverty rates are 97.9% for the school, significantly above the district rate (62.4%) and the state rate (39%). The mobility rate in the school is 22.7%, lower than the district mobility rate (31.6%) and slightly above the state rate (16.8%). As reported by the principal, families formally request that their children remain at the school even after the family has moved outside the school boundaries. Student achievement can be considered strong for a high poverty school. The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in two out of the past three years (Interactive Illinois Report Card, 2007). In the year that the school did not make AYP, student achievement was five points below target. The picture that emerges about this school is that despite high poverty in families, student achievement is strong and mobility rates are low, thereby defying one of two demographic factors proven to affect student achievement: poverty and high mobility (Duncan, 1999).

The relationship between the school and church congregation has evolved over the years. What began as a relationship-based, letter-writing initiative in second grade expanded exponentially to include a focus on reading, tutoring, and mentoring, as well as enrichment activities not previously available at the school or in the community. Every student in grades two through four has a family from the congregation who sponsors that child. Over the years other programs emerged as members of the congregation saw needs they could meet. Members of the congregation organized and maintained a funded after-school arts enrichment program; a children's choir; a summer soccer league; tutoring; classroom assistance; donations of all kinds; grade level field trips; holiday

parties and birthday celebrations; neighborhood housing and beautification efforts; school facility beautification; and, finally, individual and church support of children, families, and school staff in crisis. The Pals program emphasizes an intentionally relational partnership between the school and church.

This school-church collaboration has been lauded as successful throughout the community, and has achieved statewide recognition for student academic achievement and volunteer commitment. At the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, the school was designated as an Illinois Spotlight School, a high honor for a school with a 97.5% poverty level. Spotlight Schools are recognized by Northern Illinois University as high-poverty, high-performing schools who are beating the "achievement gap." Criteria for this award include: (1) Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by No Child Left Behind, (2) a minimum of 50% low income students in the current and previous two years, (3) a minimum of 60% of students met or exceeded state standards in the current year, and (4) a minimum of 50% of students met or exceeded state standards in the previous two years (Billman, 2005). However, exploration of what ingredients have contributed to this perceived success and how those ingredients are linked to the overall mission of the program has not been clearly articulated. Therefore, this collaborative effort between an urban elementary school and neighboring church congregation served as an exemplar suitable for instrumental case study research (Stake, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the key ingredients that contributed to the success of this program, via the interaction and discourse of key players in the program. Specifically, investigators sought to (1) perform a qualitative study that identified central themes underlying this successful collaboration; (2) effectively integrate the themes into a coherent program theory that characterized the efforts by stakeholders to impact poverty; and (3) use emerging theory to develop a framework to be adapted by other organizations including – but not restricted to – churches, to effectively address issues of poverty within their communities.

Identifying program theory, while very valuable in understanding why programs work, cannot overcome all of the challenges inherent in the evaluation of social and educational programs (Cook, 1997; Patton, 1997; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991; Torres, Piontek, & Preskill, 1996). Hacsi (2000) noted that "some programs work because of idiosyncratic factors…which cannot be easily replicated or adapted no matter how well we understand them. Political, financial, and other factors will always

complicate the spread of any program" (p. 76). The interpretive case study approach provided "an accurate but limited understanding" (Stake, 1995, p. 134) of the relationship between this particular congregation and the children and families from this urban school. Researchers investigated the program through the following research questions:

1. How do different stakeholders within and external to the program describe the intended outcomes?
2. How do the different components (activities) link to one another to approach or produce these outcomes?
3. How do key stakeholders characterize the effectiveness of the program?
4 How are the programs experienced by those involved in their implementation?

Methods

Participants

Participants in the study included teachers from the second, third, and fourth grades, church congregation members (including Sunday School class members and members of the program's task force), four parents, and the three program leaders – two female volunteers from the church and the school principal. Researchers selected participants who had significant involvement in the program; nearly all church volunteers had multiple years of participation, and each of the parents had more than one child who had participated in the program. While a few of the teachers were new to the school (and the collaborative program), the vast majority had several years experience interacting and collaborating with members of the church.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary and required the informed consent of each individual. All aspects of the study conformed to the rules and guidelines established by the university Committee for Use of Human Subjects in Research, and had the committee's approval prior to and throughout data collection. Participants were either identified by role or assigned pseudonyms, and the program was assigned a pseudonym (Pals program), as well.

Procedures

Researchers gained entry to the program through the program leaders (two volunteers and school principal) and through those in positions of formal authority within the school district and church. The two principal investigators met with the two women from the church who spearheaded the program, as well as with the school principal to describe the nature and intent of the study. The two principal investigators also conducted separate meetings to explain the

research study to the church's senior minister and to the school district superintendent prior to gathering any data from the school or church congregation.

The school principal served as the liaison for researchers in the school. He assisted in scheduling an informational meeting with teachers prior to scheduled interviews or focus groups. The women leaders served as the liaisons to the church and alerted researchers to upcoming program activities at the school, introducing participating volunteers and teachers. They also assisted researchers in scheduling focus group meetings with members of the congregation who volunteered in the program and with the program task force at the church.

Data Sources

Researchers employed multiple strategies to collect qualitative data from program stakeholders, including interviews with key informants (church volunteer leaders, school principal, church volunteer activity coordinator), a series of focus groups (parents, teachers, congregation members), ongoing observations of children during program events, and a comprehensive review of archival documents concerning the establishment and implementation of the collaborative program.

The emergent design of the study allowed questions to follow and flow from participant responses. It also allowed participants to suggest individuals for interviews, upcoming Pal events, or critical documentation which researchers should review to further understand the program. At the conclusion of interviews and focus groups, researchers requested that participants agree to follow-up member checking to confirm researcher accuracy in the summary and interpretation of interview content.

Researchers complemented the observation, interview, and program document data with researcher journals, which included observational notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes (Richardson, 1994, p. 306.) Observational notes included nonverbal communication and/or aspects of the environment, while methodological notes served as cues or reminders to follow-up with a particular individual or certain theme. Theoretical notes represented the constructs or initial concepts observed, and personal notes reflected our individual feelings within the research setting and any connection to our own social history and personal biases.

Data Collection and Analysis

Consistent with Glaser & Strauss (1967), data collection and data analysis occurred almost simultaneously. Researchers collected, transcribed, and reviewed interview and focus group data, generating narrative summaries. Recurring themes were noted and conceptualized early in the data collection

process, and subsequent data and themes were compared to these concepts and recorded on the web-based course management program (Blackboard) site dedicated to the research. Data collection and analysis was an interactive process, rather than linear, but did include completing and revisiting the steps listed below:

1. Audiotaped interviews and focus groups with participants' consent.
2. Documented observational and methodological notes (Richardson, 1994) during observations, interviews, and focus groups.
3. Documented personal and theoretical notes (Richardson, 1994) during observations, interviews, and focus groups.
4. Transcribed interviews and focus groups, and condensed transcripts into brief summaries, noting emerging themes.
5. Continuously compared emerging themes from each interview and focus group to one another.
6. Continuously compared emerging themes to archived documents, noting similar themes.
7. Acknowledged researcher positionality from researcher journals and utilized this information in interpretation.
8. Created a matrix illustrating recurring themes within the context of the four research questions (See Table 1).

No theoretical framework was imposed upon the study in order that the espoused program theory could emerge and would not be constrained by existing theoretical frameworks.

Assumptions and Limitations

The results of this case study deepen our understanding of the components of a successful school-church collaboration. It is important to note that researchers began with the assumption that this was a successful collaboration, and did not seek to either prove or invalidate this success, but rather to learn about the ingredients or components that contribute to this success.

Another assumption integral to the research is that the school-church collaboration is structured as a program. Though it involves volunteers and has expanded to address many needs inherent in the school and within the community, it is not a social service or governmental intervention, but a mediating influence (Glenn, 2000). Review of the archival documents confirms the development, implementation, and evaluation phases of the collaboration; therefore, researchers have described this collaboration as a "program."

While the findings from this case study deepen our understanding of a successful school-church collaboration, the findings are not intended to be generalized to other schools, programs, or communities, any of which exhibit

varied approaches to outreach programming. However, the findings may be used to better understand the nature of effective collaboration and the components integral to its success.

Results

The interview, focus group, and observation data was initially organized within the context of the four research questions. Archival data from program documents supported, and in some cases, further clarified the themes that emerged. Summaries of the findings in response to each research question are listed on the subsequent pages within a results matrix that depicts the themes and outcomes.

Themes and Outcomes

Data analysis revealed many interrelated themes. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, researchers sought to first conceptualize themes, then to explore the relationship of the themes to one another in an effort to illustrate the program theory for this unique collaboration. The themes as they were conceptualized in the data collection appear in Table 1.

Table 1. Results Matrix and Emerging Themes

Key Informant Group	Question 1: Intended Outcomes	Question 2: Components Linkage	Question 3: Effectiveness	Question 4: Informant Experience
Program Leaders	Educational salience Respect Advocacy Spirituality Relationships	Collaborative leadership Sustainability	Renewed community Respect Sustainability	Spirituality Moral purpose
Church Volunteers	Spirituality Relationships Poverty resources Understanding/ advocacy	Respect Spirituality Commitment Catalytic action	Spirituality Respect Renewed community Understanding/ advocacy	Spirituality Understanding/ advocacy
Parents	Educational salience Renewed community Relationships	Commitment Relationships	Respect Sustainability Commitment	Spirituality Respect Renewed community
Teachers	Social knowledge Commitment Relationships	Collaborative leadership Social knowledge	Respect Sustainability	Spirituality Educational salience

Data generated in response to the four research questions revealed two central themes and three program level outcomes. Respect and spirituality represent the central, core themes of the study because every subsequent program outcome was based in some part on these two qualities. Respect, as it was illustrated in this collaborative program, goes beyond simple acknowledgement to characterize the sustained interaction between and among program participants. Best described as affirming, the theme of respect is consistent with Isaacs' (1999) characterization:

> At its core, the act of respect invites us to see others as legitimate. Respect means honoring boundaries to the point of protecting them. If you respect someone, you do not withhold yourself or distance yourself from them. Treating people around us with extraordinary respect means seeing them for the potential that they carry within them. (p. 116)

Volunteer leaders expressed and modeled respect toward the children and maintained mutual respect with the families, the principal, and teaching staff. Parents confirmed that the volunteers and parents respected one another and learned from each other. Observations at the school confirmed such an atmosphere. Parents and visitors are greeted immediately when they walk into the office, even if the secretary is juggling many details. Students sitting in the office waiting for resolution of discipline issues are respectfully told what they need to do. Students typically comply, and even though they may need a reminder just a few minutes later, that direction is given in the same manner.

The after-school choir program exemplifies respect. A retired couple active in the Pals program realized the children needed activities during the winter months, so they initiated the choir. This collaboration also involves the park district, principal, and the director of fine arts in the local school district as the board of directors for the choir. Thirty-nine children were involved in the choir when we interviewed this couple, and there is a waiting list to join the choir. The choir performs for local nursing homes, other schools, and community events. The couple takes care of permission slips, washing choir robes, and all the myriad details of getting a group of children to a performance.

This couple visits every family prior to enrolling a child in choir to explain the program, the rules, and expectations. "We go to every family so they know who these people are, and we explain procedures because they are putting their second grader on a van with a bunch of people they don't know, and they go away someplace, where they don't know, and they are supposed to bring them back at a certain time. There is a lot of trust there." Families have responded to the couple with gratitude and support because relationships are formed based upon the assumption that poor parents have the same interests in their children as middle-class parents. The parents are seen as legitimate by the volunteers.

Spirituality was the second central theme touching all program participants. Moore (1992) notes that spirituality is not specifically religious, but rather includes creativity as well as care and compassion for self and others. This definition is consistent with the spirituality described and observed within the program. This breadth and depth reflects a broad perspective of spirituality, in which individuals long to be connected with something larger than life (Palmer, 2000). Moffett calls for "'spiritualizing education'…as a rallying cry for reform" (1994; p. 19) of American schools, meaning that everyone should be included in efforts to improve conditions for American children of all races, economic conditions, and religious backgrounds. Within the Pals program, spirituality "included expressions based on religious practice, creativity, intuition, wisdom, beliefs, appreciation for others, and compassion" (Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005, p. 136).

Taken at surface value, the support provided to students by members of the church could be perceived as a means to "make up" in small or large ways for the harsh experiences of students due to poverty. Closer scrutiny revealed a different picture. Moffett (1994) claims spirituality as all-inclusive, meaning not only inclusion of everyone, but also inclusion of the value of total human development. Spirituality, as multiple pathways to develop the body, heart, mind, and spirit at all levels of being for students and members of the congregation, was evident. Because members of the congregation developed relationships with the students, they were transformed beyond simple positive feelings about their charitable acts. Moffett claims that spirituality is the means by which all of us are compelled to focus on ways to improve the world and our relationships within it, the meaning of life, and connections between people of all backgrounds. "Most social problems stem in some way from inequalities, which can be solved by sharing" (p. 26). The poverty experienced by the students in this school certainly fits this assertion. Through their stories, members of the congregation revealed both experience with and an understanding of their spiritual growth through service to these schoolchildren.

Volunteer leaders and congregation members characterized their involvement with the school as a ministry and as expressing their faith within the neighborhood. The principal noted that his involvement in this collaborative program has deepened his faith. He put it this way: "I think that it has deepened my faith, and I found that I kind of look forward to speaking to the church members from the heart about how faith works in our lives." He described relationships between members of the congregation and students this way: "Some are still maintaining contact with buddies after they are out of high school, incarcerated, and they are still trying to help them get on with their lives." Members of the Sunday School class that originated the program

14 years ago said they willingly accept the ambivalence of joy and pain in entering into relationships with children whose lives characterized by poverty are too often chaotic and lived in a "survival mode." One woman described, "We are joyfully burdened."

A task force member characterized her involvement as a "spiritual calling." When describing the success of the program, the volunteer leaders acknowledged a strong component that was "intangible," which they attributed to faith. One volunteer put it this way:

> It has been a gift! The relationship with us. We get a lot more out of it than anyone else. I think people who are not involved in things like that are really missing out. Each one of these children is a gift. I would not trade them for anything.

Program parents, too, recognized that church volunteers were "spiritual people." The parents appreciated that members of the congregation were open to all faiths. They said volunteers model healthy respect rather than imposing their religious beliefs upon others. From the parents' perspective, they believed the program helped dispel the stigma formerly associated with the neighborhood.

From the two central core themes emerged three program level outcomes: collaborative leadership, renewed community, and poverty resources. Through the juxtaposition of the program level and their associated themes, the program theory began to take form.

Program Theory

Figure 1. Program Theory as Central Themes and Outcomes

The graphic depiction of the program theory (Figure 1) provides a visual representation of the collaboration. While aspects of this program are supported by the literature, the specific configuration of the program and experience of key informants appears to be unique. Respect and spirituality are at the core; program participants agree that without these qualities, the program would not be successful. Emerging from the core themes are the program outcomes: collaborative leadership, renewed community, and poverty resources. These outcomes are not unusual for a school collaboration with a community-based or faith-based organization; however, it is the grounding of these outcomes in spirituality and respect that make this collaboration unique.

Imagine that instead of a static diagram, that the visual depiction of the theory included movement. The core, respect and spirituality, remain fixed, while the inner circle (containing the program outcomes) and outer circle (containing the secondary outcomes) can rotate and assume new positions. In this way, one is able to see that while collaborative leadership is characterized by the secondary outcomes of moral purpose, catalytic action, and sustainability, it is not limited to those outcomes. A clockwise turn of 90 degrees also depicts commitment and relationships as outcomes of collaborative leadership, and represents the inter-relationship and the fluidity of the themes that make up this theory. Discussion of collaborative leadership, renewed community, and poverty resources, and their associated secondary outcomes will correspond to the fixed depiction of the themes as they appear in print, but the reader is encouraged to see this as a fluid representation.

Collaborative leadership revealed moral purpose, catalytic action, and sustainability. *Moral purpose* was exemplified by school and volunteer leaders in the study as not only recognizing right from wrong, but also serving the common good (Fullan, 2003), developing a common sense of purpose (Fullan; Furman, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992), and developing leadership potential in others (Fullan; Lambert et al., 1995).

The moral purpose of teachers, volunteers, volunteer leaders, and the principal were clearly demonstrated (although not stated in those terms) through all means of data gathering. Particularly evident was the desire to serve the common good, meaning the welfare of students. For members of the congregation, their understanding of social injustices inflicted upon children they came to know and care about created new and often disturbing realities about right and wrong. The principal has created means by which the leadership potential of others is part of the culture. During observations at the school, the principal was in and out of activities, always encouraging and reminding others of the purposes of the school. Teachers and other personnel in the school clearly understood their roles in ways that contributed to the well being of all.

What we have termed "catalytic action" represented efforts to move beyond the bureaucracy and its inherent boundaries to effect action and to challenge the status quo when needed (Fullan, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992). Leaders who have the capacity to see beyond the prescriptions of constraints in the environment stemming from bureaucratic policies, scarce resources, oppression, and societal issues reflected in the lives of students to focus clearly on their defined moral purpose can effect dramatic change through catalytic action (Lyman et al., 2005; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). The school principal, as well as the volunteer leaders, represent such change agents who know how to work with others to get the job done and have the capacity to work through complex issues with others in ways that energize rather than deplete the commitment of organizational members.

Sustainability referred to program founders' attention to leadership succession and continued service as community application of their faith. Leaders of the collaboration, particularly the volunteer leaders, expressed concern about sustainability of the program. To some degree their concerns stemmed from maintaining energy to coordinate so many volunteers to fill the needs of children of poverty. But other changes for the school are in store in the future (from the perspective of the time of the study). The principal will retire at the end of the 2006-07 school year. Recently, one of the volunteer leaders announced that she and her husband are leaving the area. The school and program will then have new leadership at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year. The 100+ year old building will be in use for the foreseeable future as the school board and community determine how to best remedy situations created by financial difficulties and very old buildings in the district. So for the time, the old school will remain open. [Note: At the time of publication, the new principal is finishing his second year. The superintendent announced that the school will close at the end of the 2009-10 school year; however, the church intends to continue Pals in an area school (M. Illuzzi, personal communication, April 3, 2009).]

Renewed community applied to both the school community or culture and to the urban community in which it is located. The social and geographic environment of this school/church community is permeated by poverty. Students and their families are predominantly poor and minority (African American and Hispanic). There is little commerce or business evident in the surrounding neighborhood. Typical of the jobless ghettos characteristic of poor urban neighborhoods (Wilson, 1996), the neighborhood surrounding the school has many formerly grand homes now split into apartments.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of families, as well as the socioeconomic landscape of the neighborhood, have been revisited and shown to impact academic achievement (Sirin, 2005). According to Sirin, the SES of parents

reflects the amount and nature of both the resources at home that can be applied toward education and the "social capital" (p. 420) that the students and families can draw upon. The poverty rate within the school district in the current study reflects these findings. Parents have fewer resources and limited social capital to utilize within the school environment.

However, the social environment has changed over the 14 years of the collaboration as members of the congregation have advocated for the families of children attending the school. Two Habitat for Humanity homes have been built for families, largely through the efforts of the congregation. Prior perceptions of some community members that the school's children could not perform well have been changed as a direct result of the school's academic success and acknowledgement by the state.

Members of the church have developed new understandings about people living in poverty. Church members stated an appreciation for the cross-cultural relationships developed with the students and their families through their involvement with the school:

> You learn to appreciate the struggles they go through. There is only one word for it and that is "survival."…You can hear about it, but until you experience it, you don't understand how limiting these obstacles really are. It just reinforces your desire to do this kind of ministry. Whatever you can do to give them a level playing field, to give them a chance to be successful.

Relationships depicted the importance of connection between school personnel, families, and congregation members, as well as the process to develop those connections. This sense of connection and program process is essential to move beyond bureaucratic structures to a more fluid and inclusive approach (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Wheatley, 1999). Producing such relationships is not without challenge. The families within the study have fewer resources and less social capital to apply toward the school, a situation which has been shown to adversely impact families' relationships with school staff (Sirin, 2005).

However, the relationships are truly the vehicle that makes community renewal possible. Church volunteers saw the power in the relationships and how it changed their views of those living in poverty. Parents commended the relationships within the Pals program and involvement of the church in the school. One parent said "I want my kids to do more than I did as a child."

Commitment was made to the school and to the neighborhood on the part of the families, coinciding with a commitment to, or renewal of, faith among the congregation members and program and school leaders. This differential experience of commitment and renewal illustrates the spirit that calls individuals to a common purpose (Fullan, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2001; Sergiovanni,

1992). Teachers noted that the day-in, day-out commitment of the volunteers offers both stability and continuity for the students. Church volunteers identify their commitment to the program as a priority. Though they maintain busy lives, one volunteer noted, "I make time." Parents, likewise, described in detail the different components of the collaboration and reported their gratitude that the programs were consistent year after year.

Poverty resources yielded an understanding of the importance of education and of the school, termed educational salience, as well as social knowledge, understanding of and advocacy for those in poverty. Research on community-based programs in schools confirmed the contributions of such programs (McLaughlin, 2001). Children in poverty, especially children of color, involved in community-based organizations gained in both academic and life skills that continued into adulthood. McLaughlin suggested that schools could do more to strengthen such collaborations, moving beyond merely "shared space."

The collaboration in this study goes far beyond shared space to provide poverty resources. Every child in grades two through four has a one-on-one relationship with a volunteer Pal. Payne and Krabill (2002) suggested that both individuals and organizations bring resources, connections, and hidden rules (of class) together in any collaboration. How these mesh determine how successful that experience will be. Over the years, members of the church have identified needs of the high poverty children and have worked diligently to provide programs and experiences to mediate the effects of poverty in such a way that they do mesh.

One outcome, *social knowledge*, came from the enrichment activities offered through the expanded programming (art, soccer, choir, field trips). Teachers attributed students' increased motivation to their participation in the program and appreciated that activities were age appropriate and clearly grounded in child development principles. These enrichment activities provided a space for parents to interact with the school, the school staff, and with one another in a way that facilitated, rather than hindered, parental involvement. The more traditional parental involvement initiatives in schools (e.g., PTA) have not always facilitated minority parents' voices and power as effectively (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Fine, 1993).

Educational salience referred to viewing education or the school itself in high regard as a part of the community. Payne & Krabill (2002) suggested that education, when viewed by families in poverty, is "valued and revered as abstract, but not as reality" (p. 62). Efforts to bring parents to the school through the Pals program have helped to attack that premise. The school principal described strengthened relationships between families and the school as a result of the program. Parents similarly commented that they believed school can

make a difference for their children. Teachers felt the program contributed to a more positive school culture, increasing the salience of education for all.

Finally, *understanding and advocacy* reflected the new understanding on the part of all participants and new advocacy roles assumed by church members. Families participating in the program experienced aspects of the "social toolkit" (Duncan, 1999), learning skills and habits and understanding the symbols characteristic of entry into a middle class-designed world (Duncan; Payne, DeVol, & Dreussi Smith, 2001). Congregation members learned the cyclical nature of generational poverty and replaced blame with understanding (Payne et al.; Payne & Ehlig, 1999; Payne & Krabill, 2002). The advocacy role was a new role for many congregation members, and they advocated not only for the students, but for their families, for the struggling school system, and for the faculty and staff within the school.

The emerging program theory emphasized the very necessary and effective outcomes, including collaborative leadership, renewed community, and poverty resources. In addition were the more specific secondary yet interrelated outcomes that characterized these three. However, the true core of this program theory – the central themes – are the qualities of respect and spirituality. The central themes, together with the program level and secondary outcomes, provide a framework for an effective collaboration, as described in the literature.

Discussion and Implications

Components of Collaboration

This program illustrated many of the vital ingredients that contribute to an effective collaboration. In their review of research on collaboration, Mattessich and Monsey (1992) define collaboration as a "mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals…[including] a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards" (p. 7). They identified 19 factors of collaboration grouped into six categories: environment, membership, process, structure, purpose, and resources. Effective collaborations attend to all factors as they relate to mutually desired outcomes.

The membership of this collaboration has many skills that are used to the benefit of the children of the school. Teachers, obviously, have professional skills that they have used in non-traditional ways to plan with and support volunteers coming into the building frequently to work or visit with children. Volunteers have employed their varied skills to benefit the children. As expressed by the volunteers, their faith is the driving force behind their work in

the school. The school district, park district, community, vocal group, and area nursing homes have expanded "business as usual" to accommodate and work with the volunteers and principal to provide the many experiences for the children. The attitudes of trust exhibited by parents contributed to the success of the collaboration.

The processes and structure of the program have evolved over time. The principal manages the complexities of schedules. The volunteer coordinators manage and coordinate a volunteer pool of over 250 people. The three primary leaders continuously evaluate and refine the program. Over and over we heard, "We used to do it this way, but we learned to do it better." Teachers, volunteers, and the principal continuously appraise all aspects of the Pals program based upon what works best for the needs of students.

Communication is continuous and is in all ways characterized by respect. When we were gathering data, we contacted the principal to make arrangements to conduct focus groups with the teachers. We intended to hold the groups in the teachers' lounge during the time when some teachers would typically eat lunch there. The principal stressed the commitment of the teachers to the research project, but said he wanted to check with them first to make sure no one would be inconvenienced by our use of the teachers' lounge. He e-mailed back a day later to say all was fine. The principal and volunteer leaders are conscientious about getting all events on calendars that are distributed to all involved. Procedures for Pal visits are clearly communicated to Pals at the beginning of the year orientation. Relationships and trust are central to all communications.

The shared purpose of the collaboration is the well being of the students. For members of the congregation, their faith is the foundation for the purpose of the program. The purpose as defined by the principal is constructed more in professional than in spiritual or religious terms. The shared vision for the program has evolved over time. The principal articulated goals in more concrete, attainable ways (increased academic achievement, more parent involvement, improved student behavior) than the volunteer leaders did.

The primary resources are human resources in the form of many people working together for the benefit of the students. Volunteers – in the forms of a Pal for each student, leaders of enrichment experiences, and coordinators to pull this together – make a difference in the school. The teachers' willingness to participate in planning, program activities, and flexibility that allows volunteers to visit with their Pals during the school day is essential for the success of the program. The principal uses Title I human resources (personnel, advisory board) in conjunction with the program. Funding is provided through generous donations by members of the congregation (each Pal pays $25 to participate).

American public schools face increasing pressure for collaboration with outside organizations. Collaboration is presented as a means to address many of the perceived or real ills of public education (Johnson, 1998). While this may have benefits, factors that may impede effective collaboration within schools and between other organizations must also be considered. Four structural features of school organization – the stimulus-overload work environment, teacher autonomy norm, control-orientation structures, and level of public vulnerability of schools – are factors that should be considered when planning collaborations (Johnson). Working together, teachers, parents, volunteers, and the principal have committed to find ways to create a collaborative environment where the gains exceed the costs of collaboration and shared influence or leadership is coupled with shared accountability. Based upon shared understandings of the needs of the students, teachers have expanded their professional autonomy to include others who can also help the children (Pounder, 1998).

Based upon our research, the collaboration has been very successful from multiple vantage points. Student achievement, school climate, congregational support and commitment, and teacher engagement are all focused on the well being of students. However, because relational themes of respect and spirituality depend heavily upon the individuals involved, the future of the relationship between the school and the congregation is uncertain. Fullan (2005) identifies eight elements of sustainability: public service with a moral purpose, commitment to changing context at all levels, lateral capacity building through networks, intelligent accountability and vertical relationships, deep learning, dual commitment to short-term and long-term results, cyclical energizing, and finally leadership. We believe all eight elements of sustainability were evident in the program.

The issue here relates to the future. With two of the three key leaders moving on, how will the school and congregation maintain a program that has deep meaning for all stakeholders? Fullan (2005) points to individual leadership based on clear moral purpose and system transformation. District level leadership will be critical. Fullan provides a list of rather complex lessons learned about district work that include some overlap with the building sustainability elements stated previously. The primary lesson we propose to the district is to look carefully at what has worked well in this building serving children whose needs are many. Carefully select the new leader, provide ample support and encouragement coupled with high expectations, and allow time for new relationships characterized by respect and spirituality to grow.

Fullan's ninth lesson deals with external partners (2005). The church is such a partner for this district. Our study clearly reveals that members of the congregation feel strongly about their advocacy roles for their Pals. Through an

adaptive process (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), members of the congregation came to understand poverty very differently. Stereotypes vanished as volunteers got to know their Pals and came to care deeply about the conditions of life experienced by the children. Members of the congregation will likely be invited to participate in planning and implementation for the future. The congregation is advised to understand deeper meanings of plans for the future based upon their 14-year relationship with the school.

Summary

> America needs a new and balanced vision for how poverty might be overcome. Instead of just rehashing old ideas, we must seek a comprehensive plan for change, involving every sector of society – not just the government, not just the "market," not just churches and charities, as the various competing ideological options often suggest. Rather, we should focus on the stories on the ground from the most successful and inspiring projects around the country that are truly making a difference, and listen to new approaches they suggest. (Wallis, 2005, p. 226)

We set out to understand what we believed to be a successful collaboration between a high poverty school and the congregation of a church. All evidence we gathered supports our original assumption that the collaboration enhanced the lives of the students. What we did not anticipate, but came to appreciate, was the benefit of the collaboration to all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, volunteers from the congregation, and program leaders. Based upon shared values of working together to improve the well being of the students, as well as extraordinary leadership coupled with exquisite attention to detail, this collaboration has resulted in performance beyond all expectations.

The central themes of respect and spirituality, although more difficult to pinpoint than more technical descriptions of an endeavor such as the one in this study, were clearly revealed. Without the trust developed over the years between the school, church members, and families, this collaboration would not be out of the ordinary, and would be indistinguishable from so many other programs imposed upon poor children and families. The collaboration in this study instead was a relationship that emanated from profound respect for all concerned and allowed the spirituality of all to flourish.

The American public has to devise new ways of doing school. The old factory model created over a century ago as society shifted from an agrarian to industrial model no longer works. America exists within a world that is changing more rapidly than most of us can possibly understand. Our mental model

of schools as efficient factories capable of efficiently producing graduates prepared for democratic citizenship and the workplace is not working (Senge, 1990). This outdated model works moderately well for children with middle class support systems and values that align reasonably well with school bureaucracies. The model miserably fails both society and poor children born into a world with neither support nor connections to succeed in American schools as they are currently designed.

"An organization, like a temple, can be seen as a sacred place, an expression of human aspiration, a monument to faith in human possibility" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 405). The story of this school and church provides hope that other communities and schools can come together to "spiritualize education" (Moffett, 1994, p. 19). What has come to pass between this congregation and school transcends gloom and moves forward into new hope for children of poverty, congregants of affluence, and society at risk.

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School Contexts and Student Belonging: A Mixed Methods Study of an Innovative High School

Lisa S. Johnson

Abstract

High schools have been described as potent breeding grounds of alienation and boredom (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Marks, 2000) while recent literature has focused on student-teacher relationships and the importance of pedagogies of care (Noddings, 1992; Wentzel & Looney, 2006). This paper examines the link between social context variables and the educational process by providing an analysis of the relationship between belongingness, teacher support, and school context. Using a mixed methods approach, the results illustrate the possibility and significance of supplying adolescent students with a sense of belongingness. Using interviews and surveys of student belongingness and teachers' support, this paper finds that schools which place greater emphasis on the developmental needs of adolescent students are more likely to foster a sense of belongingness and may, in turn, have important effects on a variety of student and teacher outcomes.

Key Words: student belonging, school contexts, climate, Experience Sampling Method (ESM), teacher support, adolescent development, high schools, engagement, LGBT issues, sexual minority, motivation, membership

Introduction

In 1974, Urie Bronfenbrenner described high schools as potent breeding grounds of alienation. Since this statement, a number of studies have found

similar results – noting both alienation and low levels of student engagement (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993a). In fact, some studies report that as many as 40 to 60 percent of high school students are consistently unengaged, chronically inattentive, and bored (Marks, 2000; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusich, 1986; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). Recent literature has begun to focus on student-teacher relationships and the importance of pedagogies of care (Noddings, 1992, Wentzel, 1998). While others note the need for research regarding the link between social context variables and cognitive, motivational, and educational processes, a number of scholars have called for more descriptive studies that directly address the association between psychological measures of student belongingness and motivation (e.g., Goodenow, 1992; Osterman, 2000; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992; Weiner, 1990). This paper provides an analysis of this relationship and illustrates the possibility and significance of supplying adolescent students with a sense of belongingness. The following research question guided the inquiry: Do levels of belongingness differ in relation to school context (i.e., Are levels of belongingness higher in a school that structures itself around the developmental needs of adolescent students?)?

Theoretical Background

This study was built on a body of literature which suggests that learning relies on interpersonal factors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1987; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan, 2000; Vygotsky, 1986). Baumeister and Leary's theory regarding belonging as fundamental to human motivation was used as a foundation for this work. Their theory suggests that the need to belong is "a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). This notion has been supported over the years by many scholars. For example, Deci, Vallerland, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) discuss "relatedness" as a basic psychological need that, when provided, led to students' intrinsic motivation when used in combination with support for student's individual control and choice.

In recent years, a small body of literature on student belonging has converged to link a number of positive academic outcomes to a child's sense of belonging in school. Within this literature a variety of terms have been used in the description of belonging. These terms – belongingness (Finn, 1989), relatedness (Connell, 1990; Deci et al., 1991), connectedness (Weiner, 1990), or school membership (Wehlage, 1989) – are generally parallel and interchangeable, though all have been measured in a variety of ways. As noted above, much of this literature has focused on elementary or middle school students, "at-risk

youth" or "talented teens," but regardless of population specifics, the general theory describes belongingness as a psychological need that plays a vital role in the transmission and internalization of values and cultural norms.

Belongingness and Teacher Support

The positive outcomes found regarding children's reports of quality relationships with teachers are many. Wentzel (1998) found that students' perceptions of teacher caring are significantly linked to students' internal control beliefs, school interest, and academic effort despite differences in race or socioeconomic status. These relationships between teachers and students are especially strong and important because of the multiple roles teachers have in terms of nurturing, discipline, teaching, and evaluation. For example, in elementary school, teachers' relationships with students predict students' levels of perceived control, relative autonomy, and engagement in school (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). In early adolescence, children's feelings of teacher support predict changes in motivation outcomes, achievement expectancies, and values, as well as engagement, effort, and performance (Goodenow, 1993a; Murdock, 1999; Wentzel). A number of studies have demonstrated that teacher support may have the most direct effect on student engagement beyond the support of parents and peers (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Newmann, 1992; Ryan et al.; Wentzel), with teacher caring accounting for 47% of the variance in student engagement among high school juniors and seniors in a middle income suburban community (Freese, 1999). Thus, how students feel about and do in school is, in large part, determined by their relationships with teachers.

These relationships are particularly salient during adolescence, when students begin to explore their personal identity beyond the bounds of parents and family, often relying more heavily on relationships outside of the family for support and direction (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2002). At this developmental stage, teachers can meet these needs by offering more opportunities for student collaboration and student-teacher interaction. Collaborative learning methods may address student interest by facilitating the coordination of students' social and academic or achievement goals and may help some students seek the approval of well-adjusted peers and teachers rather than strengthening their relationships with poorly adjusted peers (Urdan & Maehr, 1995). This movement toward academic approval furthers the likelihood of academic engagement and is particularly useful for adolescents who have difficulty bridging their social and academic worlds (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). Furthermore, adolescent students develop greater social cognition and have a greater ability to understand or comprehend complex social institutions (Harris, 1995; Lapsley, 1989), making the school institution a construct adolescents are apt to examine.

Context and Climate

Research suggests that future definitions of belonging must be broadened to take the unique aspects of adolescent development into account (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001; Finn, 1989; Newmann, 1992; Steinberg et al., 1996), while a few studies specifically stress that the influences of the social context be examined as well (Newmann, 1989; Wehlage, 1989). These scholars have noted that while there is widespread research evidence that a sense of belonging to school is critical to the success of students, little research evidence exists on how school context and climate affect students' sense of belonging. Despite the general lack of study in this arena, a few recent studies recognize the role of context as an important factor in the motivation of adolescent students (Anderman, 2002; Ma, 2003; Smerdon, 2002; Wentzel & Looney, 2006). In one such study review by Anderman (2002), only 25% of studies found in two major educational psychology journals (*Contemporary Educational Psychology* and the *Journal of Educational Psychology*) were studies of children or adolescents that incorporated at least two or more schools in the design of the study. Prior to Anderman's study which compared urban and suburban school populations, the relationships of perceived school belonging to various phenomena were not examined across multiple contexts.

Since Anderman's work, Ma (2003) found large school level effects with respect to explaining students' sense of belonging using a large sample of over 13,000 students in grades six and eight. Using Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM), school climate variables (academic press, disciplinary climate, and parent involvement) rather than school context variables (school size and school mean SES) were found to have statistically significant effects on students' sense of belonging. These findings highlight the fact that teachers have an important role in shaping student experience because school climate is generally flexible and under the control of school staff relative to school context variables. One would expect that a student's sense of belonging will differ depending on the context and climate – when students experience a sense of belongingness, they are more likely to function optimally because their needs are satisfied. The current study acknowledges the importance of context and climate in the study of adolescent motivation.

Rationale for the Study

To best examine a variety of learning contexts, this study examined in depth a public high school which claimed to structure itself around the developmental needs of adolescent students (Ketter, Morrison, Packard, & Pirtle, 2001). The following contextual variables were unique to this non-traditional high school: (1) School decisions regarding school policy; budget; public relations;

and the hiring and recruitment of teachers, administration, and students were all made by committees of students, administrators, and teachers. (2) Grades were not used to evaluate students. Rather than earning grades for a set of required courses, students earned credit. Evaluations were pass/fail based on completion of the work at an 80% level of mastery. Credit was based on the amount of work completed. (3) Curriculum and learning goals were developed by teachers and students in the form of contracts which included a significant amount of teacher feedback. (4) Class attendance was non-compulsory. (5) Classrooms were considered collaborative learning environments where teachers are partners in learning. (6) Unlike "alternative" schools and like the traditional school, the non-traditional school did *not* serve students considered "at-risk" of academic failure. (7) Teachers were given a great deal of autonomy and support in developing courses, lessons, and assessments, in student discipline, and in parent and community relations. It was hypothesized that these seven structural components would illicit higher levels of belongingness than a traditional school structure.

Method

Sample and Data

The Non-Traditional School

Starlight Academy is located in an urban center of a Northwestern U.S. city. The author collected data from this school in the fall of 2002. (Note: To assure anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for both schools and for all students and teachers.) Three hundred students attended classes with a teacher-student ratio of 1:25. This non-traditional school was a democratically governed, liberal arts learning community. Students and teachers worked collaboratively and demonstrated a high degree of autonomy and pro-social goals. At the time of this study, the school had high proportions of Caucasian students (77%) compared to neighboring schools (40%). The ethnic composition of the student body was 5% American Indian, 6% Asian, 6% African American, 7% Latino, and 77% Caucasian.

Students attending the non-traditional school met or exceeded state standards in all areas of assessment (reading, writing, mathematics, and listening). Annual assessments of 9th grade students at the non-traditional school also indicated that student academic achievement was higher in 2000 and 2001 than the national average. Students consistently achieved the highest composite SAT scores among the city's high schools with average scores of 609 on the verbal section and 517 on math (Seattle Public Schools, 2003).

Beyond high standardized test scores, Starlight offered unique courses, learner autonomy, and choice that few schools rival. Course offerings included: communication arts (including world, ethnic, and American literature; poetry; and creative writing), thematic social studies, world languages, multiple levels of math and science, dramatic arts (including play production and screenwriting), environmental and outdoor education, ethno-botany, a number of internships, computer graphics, animation, desktop publishing, film studies, student designed courses, community-based learning, social justice and environmental activism, solar design, woodworking (boat building), and vocational horticulture (including organic gardening).

The Traditional School

Lincoln School was selected from a nationally representative dataset collected as a part of the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development at the University of Chicago. It was chosen for its similarity to the non-traditional school sample in terms of city demographics (median household income), community history (both were in predominantly African American neighborhoods), school admission procedures, and student demographics (gender, grade level, and standardized test scores). Both schools are public institutions, have similar graduation rates, and lead a high percentage of students toward four-year and community colleges.

Lincoln School differed from Starlight Academy in a number of compelling aspects. The term "traditional school" was chosen as a descriptor for this school based on the following characteristics: (1) School decisions regarding school policy, budget, public relations, hiring of teachers and administration, and educational reform were made by the administration and faculty of the school with little or no student input. (2) Grades were used to evaluate students for the completion of their work, with little or no additional feedback. (3) Teachers and districts developed the curriculum and set the learning goals for students. (4) Class attendance was compulsory. (5) Lecture was the primary instructional method. (6) Students attending this school were not considered "at-risk" of academic failure. (7) Teachers were given some autonomy and support in developing curriculum, lessons, and assessments, but were required to follow the rules and guidelines of the district.

Differences between the two schools included: (1) the traditional sample was more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and appeared to experience lower SES (based on student responses which indicated that mothers of students in the non-traditional school were more likely to have attained an advanced degree in higher education; Table 1 demonstrates this comparability); (2) 10% of students at the non-traditional school and over 30% of the students in the traditional school received free and reduced lunch. These differences were

statistically significant in a chi-square analysis (see Table 1), but did not contribute significantly to the differences found in the HLM results.

Table 1. Gender, Grade, Race, and Parent Education by School

	Starlight Academy	Lincoln High	χ^2
Gender			
Male	32.5%	42.5%	
Female	57.5%	57.5%	
Other	10.0%†	0%	4.53
Grade			
10	50%	50%	
12	50%	50%	.000
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	5%	0%	
Hispanic	10%	15%	
Black	2.5%	25.6%	
White	72.5%	56.4%	
Mixed Race	10%	2.6%	12.51*
Parent Education			
Father			
High school graduation or less	7.9%	27%	
Less than 4-year college degree	23.7%	27%	
Graduated from college	21.1%	21.6%	
Advanced degree	36.8%	16.2%	
Don't know	10.5%	8.1%	7.15
Mother			
High school graduation or less	12.5%	35.1%	
Less than 4-year college degree	17.5%	40.5%	
Graduated from college	22.5%	13.5%	
Advanced degree	40%	10.8%	
Don't know	7.5%	0%	17.72*

Notes: *p<.05

† Non-significant differences were found with respect to gender in this analysis as well as in subsequent analyses. Further, some students considered themselves as "other" denoting either a transition in gender orientation or a lack of affiliation with either male or female categories.

Questionnaires: Teacher Support and Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)

Belongingness was measured through both teacher support and through the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM). (Note: Questionnaires are available from the author upon request; a contact is given at the end of this article.) Teacher support information was collected from students regarding the level of support they felt from their teachers. This information was collected during a one-time questionnaire administered to the students during the week of the Experience Sampling Method (ESM; Csikzsentmihalyi, 1994). The ESM is a method by which researchers examine the experience of individuals by giving them pre-programmed wristwatches or pagers that beep at random intervals throughout the course of a week. Each time the beep sounds, individuals are asked to complete a survey that assesses their experience in that moment. Students were asked to rate the level of teacher support they experienced at their school. This variable assessed students' perceptions of how many teachers at their school were caring and concerned about their academic pursuits (e.g., how many teachers at your school show interest in you, listen to your problems, ask you about your future plans, motivate you to do your best work, discuss your personal life with you, care about you, etc.). Items were rated by the number of teachers that fulfilled the item: none (1), one (2), two or three (3), more than three (4). Data for this measure were collected from the non-traditional school sample and compared to data from the Sloan Study for Youth and Social Development (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000).

Belongingness was also assessed through a measure of the PSSM (Goodenow, 1992). Data for this measure were only collected from the non-traditional school sample, and are compared to Goodenow's (1993b) results. Items for this measure were assessed on a five point Likert scale (1 = not at all true, 5 = completely true) and included the following items: "I feel like a real part of this school," "People here notice when I'm good at something," "It is hard for people like me to be accepted here" (reverse coded), "Other students in this school take my opinions seriously," "Most teachers at this school are interested in me," "Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here" (reverse coded), "There's at least one teacher or another adult in this school that I can talk to if I have a problem," "People at this school are friendly to me," "Teachers here are not interested in people like me" (reverse coded), "I am included in lots of activities at this school," "I am treated with as much respect as other students," "I feel very different from most other students here" (reverse coded), "I can really be myself at this school," "The teachers here respect me," "People here know I can do good work," "I wish I were in a different school" (reverse coded), "I feel proud of belonging to this school," and "Other students here like me the way I am."

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews of students and teachers were conducted to support and expand the quantitative findings. Ten students and five teachers offered to participate in interviews. Each half-hour interview focused on student experience at the non-traditional school and how it contrasted with a more traditional school structure. Questions included: "Why did you choose to attend the non-traditional school?" "Is your school different from other schools you have attended?" "Do you generally feel comfortable at your school?" "What is it about your school that makes you feel more or less comfortable?" "How closely are the goals of the non-traditional school aligned with what actually occurs in the school?" From transcriptions, I wrote extensive case memos and identified emergent themes regarding the nature of the supports and challenges and the motivations of these teachers. This analysis revealed interactions among contextual factors. These cases were examined for emergent themes using constant comparative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two- to three-hour classroom observations were also conducted in five classrooms (one time per classroom); notes on each classroom observation informed the analysis of this study.

Results

Teacher Support

Analyses indicated that students at Starlight Academy, the non-traditional school, on average reported that more teachers fit the supportive descriptions in the survey than students at Lincoln reported (1.68, t = 7.8, $p < .001$). These results indicate that students at the non-traditional school felt, on average, two or three teachers at their school showed an interest in them, had concern about student problems or futures, cared for, and motivated students. These results are significantly different from students at Lincoln who were more likely to report that either no teachers or only one teacher showed caring and concern for students in such capacities.

Psychological Sense of School Belongingness

When examining students' sense of school belongingness, the students at the non-traditional school reported higher levels of belongingness (mean = 3.87, SD =.59) than students from Goodenow's 1993 study of two traditional urban junior high schools (mean = 3.11, SD = .70; mean = 3.09, SD = .61). These results indicate that students at the non-traditional school appear to be feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment.

Qualitative Findings

Along with these quantitative findings, the qualitative data gathered in interviews give a more descriptive picture of Starlight Academy. Field observations and interviews were conducted with students and teachers at the non-traditional school. These data reveal a school environment consistent with the results of the quantitative analyses. They provide striking examples that illustrate the relationship between high levels of teacher support and feelings of belongingness reported by students. The following themes emerged from the data: supportive teachers, greater learning; innovative contexts and deeper investments in learning; administrative support for teachers; autonomy for teens, safer schools; and perceptions of freedom and trust for LGBT issues.

Supportive Teachers, Greater Learning

Throughout the interviews, students and teachers made comments about community, caring, and the importance of teacher-student relationships for student learning. Of the 15 students interviewed, 12 indicated that Starlight Academy provided a sense of belongingness that they enjoyed and/or often did not feel in their other schools. The link between a sense of belongingness and student learning is made in these students' quotes as they recall sharing their interests and developing relationships with their teachers through conversations about learning. Patricia, a second-year student, had just entered Starlight after attending a series of non-traditional schools (charter schools and private Montesorri/Waldorf schools). She expressed her sense of teacher concern and caring that she had experienced in her brief tenure since the beginning of the school year. At the time of the interview, Patricia had attended Starlight for less than two months, but was clearly excited and learning:

> The teachers here actually care. If you show that you're motivated and that you have the initiative…or you have an idea of how you want to get the knowledge that the class is for, then they'll work with you to figure what's going to work best for you and what concepts you understand and how you can go about learning the stuff that you don't know.

Though not a rebel himself, Marcel, a second-year student, thought that rather than rebelling against rules, students at Starlight may be learning through relationships. He explained that at the non-traditional school, he was given an opportunity to develop the relationships with teachers that he had lacked in other public schools. These relationships allowed him to excel in ways he could not previously. When asked about why he defined his school as "feeling comfortable," Marcel replied:

> The main thing that makes me feel comfortable is…communicating with teachers on a personal level. A lot of people just feel very comfortable, and it gives them ability to, um, to just be themselves here. Now, I think for a lot of kids that results in just being able to *do* school, and that's a great achievement. And then for others [it gives them the chance] to do even more, and really, really do excellent.

Innovative Contexts and Deeper Investments in Learning

Olivia discussed the non-compulsory attendance plan at Starlight and how it influenced the learning environment. She had attended non-traditional schools since elementary school; when she initially entered her previous high school she experienced classrooms full of under-motivated students:

> The majority of the kids who were there didn't want to be. So, you've got all these kids crammed into this room, learning material that they either already know or don't care about. They don't want to be there in the first place. It just wasn't a good environment for people. [Here] there are options, they're not going to try and force you, whereas with [my other school], you had to learn it because they said so, and had to learn it their way, which doesn't work, in my opinion. It might work for 2 kids out of the 30 that were crammed into that room, but for the rest of them, it doesn't mean anything.

An average number of 25 hours per week of "in-school time" were required of all students at Starlight Academy during the school year. However, students were not required by classes to attend. By having credit rather than grades, students were not punished for skipping class by getting failing grades, but were simply not given the credit they need to graduate. This left some students taking on a second senior year – which was surprisingly not stigmatized like it might be at other schools. Two second-year seniors explained that staying at Starlight for a fifth year "was the best choice [they] could have made."

The change from grades to credit also altered the atmosphere of the classroom. Two students mentioned "sleeping" and "doodling" classmates in their former schools. Elizabeth summed it up when I asked her to explain what her classes were like at Starlight compared to her classes at her former school, which was also a non-traditional school:

> One, the classes at [this school] are way smaller because people who don't want to learn whatever it is, don't come. So you're left with a group of kids who care about the material and are going to be quiet and do the best they can. At my other school there are too many people, and the teachers can't, because of the class sizes, work with you independently. It's like chaos.

She explained that by giving students the freedom of choice as to whether or not to attend class, teachers were actually less burdened by students who were uninterested in learning.

> Here they actually give you a choice, and they will help you make the right choices, and follow through with them. So, you choose what classes you have, you choose what coordinator you have, you choose if and when you go to class, and you choose to learn something. And if you decide not to, then that's your deal. So the teachers are left with the opportunity to work with the kids who completely want to learn.

Brendan, a fifth-year student, explained that the climate at Starlight Academy did not breed apathy, at least not in the classroom. Like Olivia, Brendan suggested that the climate generated energy rather than apathy because the people who attended classes were making a statement that they were interested by simply showing up:

> And here it's just the energy, just the feeling that the people will care so much more. It's just the greatest thing to be in a classroom where everyone, everyone is just totally into it. People here, you know, aren't afraid to care about something, and aren't afraid to, like, show that they care about it. [In my other school,] it wasn't cool to be interested in what the teacher had to say.

Administrative Support for Teachers

Beyond supportive relationships between teachers and their students, teachers' growth was also fostered through their supportive relationships with administration. Teacher interviews displayed the importance of administrator support as teachers dealt with the challenges of parent and student relationships and as teachers established relationships with the school community. Here Michael, a second-year science teacher, describes how the principal of Starlight Academy supported him as he struggled with a student and parent that misunderstood his intentions to bring a student into a classroom discussion:

> I remember there was a kid who felt like he had been shamed and completely misunderstood what had happened in a class and relayed it to his mom in way that was not realistic. She called the principal and the principal was like, "I totally hear what you're saying, and let's bring all of us together to talk, but I want to let you know, [Michael] would never do that. It just did not happen like that. He would never do that." [The principal] will stand up in those situations in a big way, and staff will do that, too.

Other teachers shared the importance of having the principals' support as they developed innovative classes, dealt with challenging student discipline

issues, and made recommendations to the school board for the future development of their school.

Autonomy for Teens, Safer Schools

Beyond a general sense of belongingness, there are implications for school safety and student learning. As noted by Bryk and Schneider (2003), urban schools experience many challenging conditions – such as low SES, poor building conditions, and class and race differences between school professionals and students – that can lead to misunderstanding and distrusting relationships. These possible problems seemed to be quelled by the sense of community fostered at Starlight Academy.

A second year student new to Starlight, Brittan shared a similar opinion:

> Here teachers just approach their students more on equal footing so they're not, teachers aren't always these like big, scary authority figures that you have to like rebel against. They're, you know, they're not, you know, they're people, and they have connections with the students, and at a lot of schools, they forget that….It was much more of a conservative, much more based around the authority of the administration. It was just a classic high school. There were detentions. The teachers didn't have to teach.…The relationships were almost always on an authoritarian basis. There was no, like, sort of, it just didn't have the community that [Starlight] has.

Paul, a fifth-year history teacher, explained that knowing students well provides more trust and, in turn, more freedom for students and faculty alike.

> When there's a student who does not have a relationship with an adult, they tend to not be terribly trustworthy. And when the students do, it's a lot more comfortable, and you can trust people a lot more. Um, you kind of know what somebody is and isn't capable of doing, you know how far to trust them, and they also know that you know them well enough to know that something might have their signature on it if they do it. And you also can look them in the eye and know if they're lying, usually. And so, in that sort of environment, there's so much more freedom, and so much, you know – I think that's a huge thing that other schools should learn from this school. Personalization is everything.

Perceptions of Freedom and Trust for LGBT Issues

The sense of belongingness provided at Starlight Academy further affected students and teachers in a positive way by providing support for minorities. Though few racial or ethnic minorities participated in the qualitative portion of this study, the sample population did host minorities in terms of gender

and sexuality. Starlight was a place of refuge for sexual minorities (homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual). One teacher expressed how administrative support and the openness of the school community relieved his concerns about bringing his same-sex partner to graduation and other school events, an idea that he would have been concerned with elsewhere. The school focus on building professional relationships between students and teachers helped this teacher become open to the idea of sharing his personal life with his students and colleagues. The importance of this freedom is perhaps best understood through the perspective of student Renee. For Renee, Starlight was a place of refuge. It was a place where she felt a sense of belonging and was noticed by her peers and her teachers for achieving academically rather than noticed for being different.

> The social situation here is less awkward. At my old school, I was the only out queer kid in the entire school, and so I was "the lesbian," you know? It's so incredibly hard to do that. And, here I'm just, you know, one of a bunch of queer kids, so I don't even have to worry about it, you know? Before, I felt like my only role was to bring up the queer issues, to be the person who, if teachers were talking about relationships or whatever, and they're like, "You all deserve boyfriends, [and then they look to me] or a girlfriend." You know, oh my god! That bugs me! Like, I understand that they're trying to be nice to me, but the fact that they have to go, "oh, and, and you're cool too." You know, like, "I'm okay with that." Bugs the hell out of me!
>
> And here the teachers are more informed. You couldn't find an out queer teacher in a lot of schools, that just wouldn't happen. And here, they do. So, when you have positive role models that help the younger generation accept it, and it helps you feel less alone. And when a lot of teachers have considered your school as a safe place that makes you feel a whole lot better. It's not like it's a predominantly queer school, it's just that it's safe.

Considering that hate crimes and intolerance exist despite the strides many minorities have gained in the last decades, this freedom was not taken lightly and is recognized as an important element of belongingness at Starlight Academy.

Discussion

Strong empirical support was found for the proposition that schools that place greater emphasis on the developmental needs of adolescent students are more likely to foster a sense of belongingness. Qualitative results suggest that the non-traditional school fostered trust through student-teacher, teacher-administrator, and student-student relationships. Through interviews, students

at Starlight Academy indicated that their school provided a sense of belongingness that they often did not feel at other schools. The context provided in the non-traditional school appears to have important effects on students' feelings of autonomy and investment in learning, school safety, and the experience of sexual minorities.

This study is valuable for a number of reasons. Research suggests that feelings of belongingness diminish as students age (Wentzel & Looney, 2006) and that the correlation between academic engagement and relatedness to teachers is stronger for older students (Anderman, Maehr & Midgley, 1999; Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Here, results indicate that older adolescents attending Starlight felt a stronger sense of school membership than younger students in the Goodenow (1993) sample. The results of the current study present a valuable example of a high school where students are feeling a sense of belonging.

In addition, this study is one of few to compare school contexts and belongingness. The findings here re-emphasize expert suggestions regarding pedagogies of care for enhanced learning experiences and for safer school environments (Darling-Hammond, Ancess & Ort, 2002; Noddings, 1992). We know that engaging students intrinsically is not realistic as a basis for instruction when students are required to attend classes and when the curriculum is largely imposed by the administration (Brophy, 1999). The unique school and classroom contexts provided by Starlight Academy may have induced higher levels of belongingness. Students simply did not attend classes if they were not interested, leaving classrooms full of relatively motivated students.

Beyond the effects of school context on adolescent students, the findings here suggest that teachers too experience greater satisfaction with their work and an openness to share their private lives with the school community when they have a sense of belongingness. This openness may be due in part to the collegiality supported by the structural arrangements of the school. Teacher workplace researchers suggest that collegiality is one of the most important organizational characteristics influencing teachers' professional commitment, performance, and sense of efficacy (Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). These findings are relevant for both teachers and students. Teacher satisfaction leads to important positive outcomes with regard to student learning. Teachers who experience job satisfaction are absent less often and are seen by students as enjoying teaching (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988, as cited in Smerdon, 2002), and this contributes to their shared sense of belongingness. Teachers that are satisfied and committed have been found to increase students' commitment to academic activities and to the school as an organization (Firestone & Rosenbaum, 1988). Thus, the commitment and satisfaction expressed by teachers at Starlight Academy may contribute to student learning and commitment. Teacher

education programs that offer time for reflection on their own "ethic of care" may help in bolstering such positive outcomes for teachers and students alike (Noddings, 2003).

Starlight Academy provided a strong example of how strong teacher-student relationships can influence student engagement and assist in creating a safer learning environment. This is of great concern for our public schools as they face the challenge of teen violence. The multitude of bullying programs, security procedures, and zero-tolerance policies developed for public high schools aim to address this violence, and while made with good intention, scholars, parents, and students alike have questioned their effectiveness in making schools safer, at least in terms of emotional safety (Delpit, 1995). Scholars suggest that by letting policy rule, we imply that we as educators do not have the ability to deal with such situations, that we are powerless to the system, and untrusting or even afraid of the students we aim to teach. Truly safe schools are founded on strong alliances between students and teachers and administration. With students outnumbering teachers in all schools, these alliances are crucial. They illustrate trust and create safe places where both students and teachers have the power to make the system work.

This study also brings our collective attention to the struggles of sexual minority youth. The struggle for fair treatment of sexual minority youth in public schools is compelling. In a nationally representative study of over 3,000 high school students, two-thirds of the sample reported that they had been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted at school during the past year because of their appearance or their actual or perceived race/ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, or religion (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network, 2005). Other studies find similar results (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). The current study provides the field with an example of a public school that provides a sense of safety for sexual minority youth.

Limitations of the Present Study

The implications of these findings for research and practice should be discussed in the context of the study's strengths and limitations. Limitations result from differences in the samples in terms of time, culture, and basic cohort effects. Furthermore, students were self-selected to participate in this study and also were self-selected by choosing to attend either of the schools examined in this study. Finally, the relatively small sample limits our ability to generalize the results, and the data presented are cross-sectional, thus associations identified may not be interpreted in terms of causation. Despite these limitations, the study makes a valuable contribution by examining belongingness and school contexts using a mixed methods approach.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the difficulty in radically restructuring public schools to fit the Starlight Academy model, the results of this study suggest that schools should consider the effects of teacher support and belongingness on the achievement of high school students. Considering the low levels of belongingness found in traditional high schools nationwide, public schools would do well to consider the structures implemented by the school of focus in this case study, particularly those structures that attend to adolescent needs of agency, belonging, and competence (Mitra, 2004).

Belongingness and teacher support are important and often unnoticed variables for adolescent learning. This study makes an important contribution to the literature at a time when standardized testing of academic achievement is often used as a sole indicator of student learning or as a sole criterion for evaluating the success of implemented programs. Such assessments of learning are highly limited and questioned by researchers, preservice instructors, and other educators (Eggen & Kauchak, 2000; Steinberg et al.,1996). Academic achievement is but one measurement of student success that must be used in combination with other learning outcomes. Educators would do well to consistently recognize that teacher support and adolescents' sense of school membership are important factors associated with learning and motivation.

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School-Parent-Community Partnerships: The Experience of Teachers Who Received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Osamha M. Obeidat and Suha M. Al-Hassan

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the school-parents-community partnerships created by teachers who received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education. This study analyzes the applications of the 28 teachers who received the Award in 2007 and addresses three questions: How do teachers who received the Queen Rania Award communicate with parents and the broader community? What kinds of voluntary work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school? And, How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues and then motivate students to be involved in the community? The findings of the study show that teachers connect with parents and the community in five ways: (1) communicating with parents, (2) involving parents in the learning process, (3) involving the community in the school, (4) pursuing volunteer projects, and (5) involving students in the community. Each of these categories are divided into several themes that represent ways to connect with parents and the community.

Key Words: schools, parents, community, partnerships, teachers, excellence, Queen Rania Award, education, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, promising practices, collaboration, educators, communication, involvement, students

Introduction

Jordan is a small, middle-income country with a narrow natural resource base, water scarcity, limited oil resources, a small domestic market, and a predominantly young population. It is located in a region where political and security upheavals have had severe repercussions on the country's development. With 5.6 million inhabitants, Jordan has one of the youngest populations among lower-middle income countries – 38% of the population is under the age of 14. The relatively comfortable economic situation that Jordanians enjoy today can be credited to the Kingdom's ability to maintain social and political stability, but also depends on one of the world's highest shares of unilateral transfers, in the form of workers' remittances and public grants. Jordan has invested heavily in its education system and in its human resources and for decades has been a major supplier of skilled, educated, and trained workers to the countries in the region. This investment was recounted recently in the 2008 World Banks' report, "The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa." Based on this report, Jordan has the region's best education system in terms of access, equity, efficiency, and quality.

Based on the 2008 regional review of the "Education for All" report (UNESCO, 2008), Jordan has the second highest adult (15 and over) literacy rate among the Arab states. The total literacy rate is estimated to be 91%. It was only outperformed by Kuwait, which has a 93% literacy rate. However, Jordan's males have the highest rate (94.4%) among all the Arab states. The report also showed that Jordan had achieved a gender parity goal in both primary and secondary education by 2005. Jordan has a Gender Parity Index of 1.01. Finally, on the Education for All Development Index (EDI), Jordan has the second highest EDI (0.947) among the Arab states.

Over the past five years, Jordan has shown a clear and aggressive commitment towards education reform. The government has adopted a system-wide comprehensive plan titled Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE). This reform initiative was launched in 2003. The first phase ended in 2008, and the second phase (ERfKE II) is beginning in 2009. This project is the first of its kind in the region. Four major components were identified in ERfKE I, namely: (1) reorienting education policy objectives and strategies and reforming governance and administrative systems; (2) transforming education programs and practices to achieve learning outcomes relevant to the knowledge economy; (3) supporting the provision of quality physical learning environments; and, importantly, (4) promoting learning readiness through expanded early childhood education. This reform has involved a public-private partnership with many local and international organizations, donors, and

companies supporting Jordan's efforts. The major contributors are the World Bank, USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Microsoft, and Cisco. The reform agenda recognized the role of teachers and perceives them as the true engineers and engines for change amid this reform. This recognition was translated into several initiatives for teacher professional development, including introducing a system of promotion for teachers and training teachers in information and communication technology.

The most visible initiative that indicates the attention given to teachers is the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education[1] (QRA). The Award was launched by His Majesty King Abdullah in 2005 in observance of World Teachers' Day. The vision of the Award is to raise the bar of excellence in education by measuring, advancing, rewarding, and honoring merit and achievement in teaching. The Award objectives are to develop and implement sustainable award systems according to international best practices, which

- pay respect to the profession,
- select the best teachers and schools based on objective, fair, and transparent criteria that are easily understood by all,
- become a strategy for teachers and schools to follow in their paths towards excellence, and
- enable exchange of innovative ideas and best practices.

Only public school teachers are eligible to apply. The first year (2006), the Award received 1,126 applications, while in the second round (2007), it received 1,309 applications.

Although it is still early to evaluate the impact of the Award on nurturing a culture of excellence, so far it is increasingly getting the attention of teachers and other educators and becoming a prestigious Award that motivates teachers to excel. According to a 2006 winner, "Such an award uplifts the morale of all teachers, because this way they will be motivated to excel to be like their peers who won the Award" (Abu Aridah, quoted in the *Jordan Times*, 2006). The winners participate in local, regional, and international conferences. Special programs for professional development and follow up are organized for the winners by the Award's administration in coordination with the Ministry of Education. In addition to these professional development opportunities, winners receive other incentives. First place winners in each of the five categories receive 3,000 Jordanian Dinar,[2] a plaque, and letter of appreciation, and they are also promoted on the civil service scale and get extra points, enabling them to compete for the position of educational supervisor. Second place winners receive 1,500 Jordanian Dinar; those in third receive 500 Jordanian Dinar.

Teachers who apply for the Award are evaluated on these nine standards:

1. Teachers' personal philosophy and values;
2. Teaching effectiveness;
3. Resource management;
4. Professional development;
5. Relationship with community and parents;
6. Work relations, collaboration, and commitment;
7. Innovation and creativity;
8. Assessment; and
9. Outcomes/performance.

There are two phases for evaluating the applications. The first one is done at the Award's offices by well-trained evaluators. During this phase, all the applications are graded according to a rubric set by experts in measurements and evaluation, which leads to the composition of a list of finalists ready for the second phase of evaluation. During the second phase, each of the finalists is visited by a committee of three to be observed in the classroom for one full day. During this visit, the committee meets with the teachers, principal, parents, and other people from the community, and also reviews all the documents the teacher mentioned in the application.

The national education strategy stresses the importance of involving students, teachers, principals, and the local community in the development and sustaining of an effective, safe, supportive, and healthy learning environment (Ministry of Education, 2006). The strategy also stresses the importance of partnerships between schools, parents, families, and local communities. Therefore, this study is motivated by the need to understand these partnerships, which can be examined by looking at standard number five of the Award, that is, teacher's relationships with the community and parents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and examine school-parents-community partnerships. There is not much research available on schools, parents, and community partnerships in Jordan. Also, many international studies view parental involvement as the most important aspect of such partnerships (Graham-Clay, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Rubin & Abrego, 2004; Sirvani, 2007). Therefore, this study has two major goals: first, to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge about school-parents-community partnerships in Jordan, and secondly, to add to the international literature on school-parents-community partnerships by looking at a dimension that is not getting enough attention from researchers (i.e., focusing on the role of the teacher in this partnership). More specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers who received the QRA communicate with parents and the community?
2. What kind of volunteer work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school?
3. How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues and then motivate students to be involved in the community?

Previous Studies

A growing body of research shows that the involvement of parents and families in the schooling of their children makes a significant difference, not only in improving students' behavior and attendance, but also positively affecting student achievement (MetLife, 2005; Michael, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007). Regardless of income and background, students with parents who are involved in their academic careers are more likely to earn high grades, attend school regularly, show improved behavior, adapt well to school, and have better social skills; also, "parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 38). According to Henderson (1994) and Hatch (1998), parental involvement also has a positive impact on teachers (i.e., the teacher understands the child's home and cultural environment and feels supported), on schools (i.e., fewer discipline problems), and on parents themselves (i.e., improved confidence in the school and themselves). Some researchers, such as Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007), point out the necessity of close relationships between families and teachers in order to understand each other's values and beliefs, so that each can create learning environments at home and at school that recognize the knowledge and practice of the other.

Several researchers have documented the challenges associated with school, family, and community partnerships. Rubin and Abrego (2004), for example, indicated that parents are not involved with their children's learning because of cultural and communication barriers; confusion with education jargon; feelings of inferiority, inhibition, inadequacy, or failure; lack of understanding of the school system; staff's lack of appreciation of the student's culture or language; and parents' previous negative experiences or feelings toward schools. Other researchers, such as Dodd and Konzal (2002), examined the success factors in school-parents-community relationships. They found that an open and trusting communication between teachers and parents is critical. This was also stressed by Sirvani (2007) who found a positive relationship in his study on the effect of teachers' communication with parents on students' mathematical

achievement. The study included 52 freshman high school students and compared the mathematics achievement of the students with involved parents with students whose parents were not involved. Sirvani found that those students with involved parents significantly outperformed the control group.

Attitude is another potential success factor. A survey of more than 400 parents of high school students in Maryland revealed that their attitudes toward their children's schools are positively influenced by efforts schools make to promote partnerships with them. Also, the parents are more likely to come to the school if school personnel encourage them to be volunteers and participate in decision making (Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999). School factors, specifically those that are relational in nature, have a major impact on parents' involvement. When school staff engage in a caring and trusting relationship with parents and view parents as partners in the education of their children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development. Parents have to feel they are welcomed and respected, a terminology that Minuchin and Fishman (1981) called the *joining process* that consists of welcoming, honoring, and connecting. The process of welcoming created a sense of belonging, and this sense motivated parents to be more active in their children's schooling. In their 1997 study, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler created a model for parental involvement. One of the major influencing factors for greater parental involvement was an inviting climate at school, which refers to the frequency that schools actually invite parents to be involved in their children's schools and parents' perceptions of being welcome at school.

Epstein (1995) has identified six general types of activities that can help parents, schools, and communities come together to support children's education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Partnership programs should draw on each of this elements, Epstein says, and design a program that takes into account the unique character of the local community and the needs of its students and families.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) defines parental involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (Sec. 9101 [32]). Parents, the law suggests, should be full partners in their child's education, play a key role in assisting in their child's learning, and be encouraged to be actively involved at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2005), successful parent involvement can be defined as the active, ongoing participation of

a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child. Parents can demonstrate involvement at home by reading with their children, helping with homework, and discussing school events and at school by attending functions or volunteering in classrooms. Schools with involved parents engage those parents, communicate with them regularly, and incorporate them into the learning process.

To widen the term "involvement," it is used here to indicate not only parental but also community involvement. What applies to parental involvement is believed to be applicable to community involvement at large, including citizens other than students' parents, non-governmental organizations, and local public institutions. Another related term that needs to be identified here is "community engagement." According to Berg, Melaville, and Blank (2006), community engagement is defined as a two-way street with the school, families, and the community actively working together, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success. It is a tool that promotes civic well-being and that strengthens the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support young people's full development. In recent years, research on school-community connections has tended to move from using the word "relationship" to the word "partnership" and from the notion of "parent as helper" to "parent as partner." Partnership is a two-way street that embraces mutual benefits to all partners, and the research is focusing on what makes a successful school-community partnership. For example, Mapp (2002) sought to identify the factors that lead to successful educational partnerships between school staff and families in the Boston area to understand how and why parents were involved in their children's education and what the parents' believed were the helpful factors. Participating in school advisory councils, interview committees, or policymaking groups give parents ways to work with schools to solve problems and achieve common goals. Also, "effective partnerships between teachers and parents become even more essential to meet the needs of the children they 'share'" (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 117). According to Ferriter (2008), it is important that teachers view parents as partners, and at the same time parents should recognize that teachers are professionals.

Methodology

As previously discussed, this current study focuses on the fifth standard of the QRA – the relationship with community and parents. According to the Award's rubric, this standard aims at identifying the procedures and methods that teachers utilize in order to inform parents about the behavioral and academic status of their children and also to involve parents in the learning

process. It also describes how teachers enhance a sense of societal belonging among children. This standard is measured by evaluating the following:

- Actions taken by the teacher to keep parents informed all the time about their child's performance and behavior and also to take advantage of the experiences and capacities of parents in the learning process.
- Supporting activities and volunteer work that the teacher performs to serve the local community and to raise students' awareness of local and international issues (environment, citizenship, globalization, diversity) and enhance their sense of belonging to their community.

The sample for this study consisted of 28 teachers who received the QRA in October 2007. The awardees included 5 male and 23 female teachers. Seven of the teachers taught (one of) grades 1-3, eight teachers taught from grade 4-7, six teachers taught from grade 8-10, five teachers taught grade 11 or 12, and two teachers taught in vocational schools. The Award's office provided the authors with a blind copy of the winners' responses on Award standard #5 which addresses the teachers' relationship with community and parents. Applicants were asked three open-ended questions to measure their relationship with the community and parents. They were asked about:

- The procedures they follow to keep parents updated regarding their child's performance/achievement/behavior;
- How they take advantage of the parents' skills in the teaching and learning process; and
- What supportive and voluntary activities they do to serve the community and to raise students' awareness of local and global issues, and how is this reflected in students' feeling of belonging to their community.

The applications were filled out in Arabic and were translated by the authors, who are native speakers of Arabic.

The data was analyzed by categorizing it around the three research questions: communicating with parents, volunteering, and encouraging and raising students' awareness of community issues. The responses were then grouped into categories and themes.

Findings

The findings of this study are shown in Table 1. In answer to the first research question, "How do teachers who received the QRA communicate with parents and the community," three themes emerged from the applications of teachers: communicating with parents, involving parents in the learning process, and involving the community in the learning process.

Table 1. Categories and Themes Emerging from the Study

Category	Theme	Frequency
Communicating with parents	Phone calls	9 (31%)
	Reports	20 (69%)
	Individual meetings	19 (65%)
	Using technology	8 (27%)
	Teacher visits parents	4 (14%)
Involving parents in the learning process	Use of parents' skills	8 (27%)
	Ask parents to make donations	10 (34%)
	Invite parents to the classroom	7 (24%)
	Involve parents in the homework	5 (17%)
Volunteering	Teachers volunteer in the community	26 (89%)
	Teachers volunteer in schools	10 (34%)
	Community awareness (brochures)	9 (31%)
Community involvement	Community donations	5 (17%)
	Community participation in occasions	7 (24%)
Involve students in the community	Encourage students to volunteer	10 (34%)
	Lecturing	8 (27%)
	Site visits	9 (31%)

Communicating with Parents

The study shows that teachers used a variety of methods to communicate with parents. These methods included phone calls, reports, meeting with parents individually, using technology, and visiting parents at home.

Phone Calls

Nine teachers (31%) communicated with parents by phone. Most of the teachers called parents whenever there was a need, such as a decline in a child's performance or whenever a child made problems or behaved inappropriately in the classroom or in school. Teachers also called parents in order to encourage them to follow up and help their child with homework.

Reports

Sixty-nine percent (n = 20) of the teachers communicated with parents by sending weekly, monthly, or per semester reports home. These might be grade reports that parents were asked to approve and sign, in order to make sure the children showed their grades to their parents. Some teachers prepared folders which included samples of the student's work and grades and regularly sent the folders to the parents so that they could monitor their child's progress. As one kindergarten teacher said, "There are cards that monitor the child's development, physical health, and religious knowledge that we fill out and send to parents so they can monitor the progress of their kids." The purpose of these reports is to keep parents updated regarding their child's academic progress and achievement. Also, these reports are one way to inform parents of the academic and behavioral status of their children.

Use of Technology

Eight teachers (27%) communicated with parents via the use of EduWave.[3] The teachers created passwords for parents so they could access their child's grades online. These teachers all taught grades 6-12; none of the teachers of early grades used this communication channel.

Meetings with Parents

Individual meetings with parents were mentioned by teachers (n = 19; 65%) as another way to communicate with parents. These meetings could be on a regular basis or at the beginning of the semester to get to know parents and to talk about their child and his or her academic status. These meetings could be initiated by parents or by teachers. A classroom teacher said that she met regularly with parents "by organizing a workshop called 'the door to success' in which the counselor, the principal, and other teachers participate in a dialogue with parents on the best ways to deal with low student performance." Some of these meetings took place whenever there was an urgent need.

Another way to meet with parents, although it was mentioned by only three teachers, was visiting parents in their homes. Those teachers who reported visiting parents did so mostly to show sympathy for a death in the family, but one teacher mentioned that she visited different parents each month.

Involving Parents in the Learning Process

Use of Parents' Skills

As shown in Table 1, 27% (n = 8) of teachers reported that they took advantage of parents' skills and capacities in order to improve students' skills and knowledge. Teachers benefited from parents in several ways. For example, one

teacher said, "I asked a parent who is a carpenter to make boards and boxes for activities. And another parent made masks for students to be used in an acting performance." One parent hosted students at the mosque and taught them how to pray. Another mother invited children to her farm to see the animals there. One parent who works in agriculture helped in designing a small garden for the school. One science teacher involved parents in a recycling project, saying, "Each student has to prepare a project with the help of her parents. This enhances the relationship between the parents-daughter on one hand, and school-parents on the other hand."

Parents' Donation

Occasionally, teachers also depended on parents' donations and help. Ten teachers (34%) mentioned that they received donations from parents. For example, a drama teacher mentioned that "parents provide services such as designing the décor and accessories for the play." A tenth grade geography teacher said that he collaborates with parents who work at the Royal Geographic Center or the Department of Statistics to provide him with maps and brochures to be used in his class. A vocational education teacher explained the benefits of parents' donations: "[B]ecause of communicating with parents, I was able to receive some instruments, maintenance books, and other stuff that helped me in training students."

Involve Parents in Homework

Another way of involving parents in the learning process is by involving them in the homework of their children. Few teachers (5 out of 28; 17%) involved parents in their children's homework. As one English teacher explained, "I involve parents in the learning process by asking them to help their kids with their homework, because I am convinced that students' performance improves when parents are involved in their education."

Community Involvement

Twelve teachers involved the community in the learning process in two different ways. The first way was by inviting the community to participate in celebrating the national and religious occasions recognized in schools and asking specialists from the community into the school, such as the physician from the local health center, dentists, religious lecturers, or traffic specialists. The second way of involving the community was by asking them to make donations to the school, for example, one teacher asked the municipality council to provide trash bags to the school.

Teachers as Volunteers

Regarding the second research question, "What kind of volunteer work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school?", three themes emerged: teachers volunteer in the community, volunteer in the school, and prepare brochures to raise community awareness of social issues.

Volunteering in the Community

Almost all teachers (n = 26; 89%) did some kind of volunteer work in the community. The kind of volunteer work pursued by these teachers included:

- Organizing workshops for the community on how to deal with children;
- Training the community on the International Computer Driving License (ICDL);
- Organizing cleaning campaigns in the village and painting street curbs;
- Preparing bulletins and brochures to raise awareness in the community of the importance of voting for Petra[4] and brochures about the constitution, bird flu, and so on;
- Cleaning and doing maintenance to the nearby mosques and charity organizations;
- Helping farmers in the collection of olives; and
- Organizing a workshop for mothers on how to prepare dairy products and pickles. (The same teacher also designed a brochure on medical wastes and raised awareness of health issues in the community.)

Volunteering in the School

This study found that 10 teachers (34%) did some kind of voluntary work in their schools. This work included:

- Planting trees in the school's garden;
- Teaching crafts and fine arts during summer school;
- Training the school's athletic team;
- Buying a microphone and amplifier for the school's morning program;
- Training Arabic teachers in the district on how to do content analysis;
- Organizing workshops in collaboration with the Ministry of Water on water conservation.

Involving Students in the Community

Regarding the third research question, "How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues, and how do they motivate students to be involved in the community?", three themes emerged from the study. These included encouraging students to volunteer, raising students' awareness of issues through lecturing, and visiting local sites.

Students as Volunteers

Ten teachers (34%) who taught grades 4-11 encouraged students to do volunteer work in the community. Such activities included participating in cleaning campaigns, such as cleaning the playground or the mosque. Teachers had also encouraged students to help families collect olives during the harvesting season or to collect things they do not need and donate them to needy families.

Lecturing

Twenty-seven percent of the teachers (8 out of 28) were able to raise students' awareness of issues such as traffic safety, the constitution, citizenship, voting for Petra, water conservation, and children's rights. One fourth grade science teacher said, "I teach kids about tolerance and how to respect other religions and all prophets."

Site Visits

Involving students in site visits is another way to raise students' awareness of the community. Nine teachers (31%) mentioned that they took students on site visits. These included visits to archaeological sites, museums, parks, and natural conservatories. One tenth grade English teacher explains, "I took students to visit Princess Raya Hospital and discuss some health and environmental issues with the director of the hospital and also to get to know the different parts of the hospital. At the end of the visit, students visited some patients."

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study aims to identify the ways in which teachers who received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education partnered with parents and the community. The study revealed that there were five ways by which these distinguished teachers connected with parents and the community, including: communicating with parents, involving parents in the learning process, involving the community in the school, volunteering, and involving students in the community.

Teachers in this study communicated with parents through both interactive (via phone, meetings, technology, and visits) and non-interactive (via reports) means. The most popular means of communication was via sending progress reports to parents (69% of teachers) followed by individual meetings with parents (65% of teachers). Meetings are a very important and effective method of communication in which teachers and parents engage in a dialogue with each other in the interest of the child. It is important to stress here that these meetings should be viewed as an opportunity to discuss what is working with these

students and not to focus only on what is not working in school. Another type of two-way communication is using the telephone. Some teachers (31%) reported placing calls to parents, mainly when children misbehave or when they receive low grades. Although it is important to share a concern about the child, which can be a source of tension for both teachers and parents, it is also necessary to call parents to recognize the child's progress or a job well done, which Love (1996) called the use of "good news calls." According to Love, this will promote positive relations with parents.

The study also found that teachers communicated with parents via technology, which refers here to the use of e-mail and the teachers' portal (EduWave). About a quarter (27%) of the teachers studied sent and/or exchanged e-mails with parents. Those teachers who are trained and have access to internet can provide updates that are easily accessed by parents regarding homework assignments, test schedules, resource links, and so on. It is important to point out, however, that not all families have a computer at home, and those who have one do not necessarily have access to the internet. Access also varies according to geographical location. For example, families in rural areas have less access to internet at home compared with those who live in urban areas.

The study found that teachers involved parents in the learning process in several ways, including the use of parents' skills, asking parents to make donations to be used by the teacher, inviting parents to the classroom, and involving them in their children's homework. These are important means of parental involvement, and it indicates that teachers view parents as partners who accept such responsibilities for the sake of their children. Parents are considered important resources that can be utilized by teachers. Parents have skills, capacities, money, time, and experience that help in promoting the learning process. When teachers ask parents to visit the classroom and help them in the class, this makes parents feel they are important and also makes them feel more responsible toward their children and toward the school. The literature listed in the introduction clearly shows several advantages when parents are involved in the learning of their children. Teachers who were examined in this study seemed to realize this, as they are already involving parents in many ways.

Regarding teachers' volunteerism, the findings were interesting and unexpected. Almost all these teachers did some kind of volunteer work. Volunteering in Jordan is still not instilled in the culture, and it is not institutionalized (Obeidat & Al-Hassan, 2007). Thus, this volunteerism is something that makes these teachers distinguished. The variation of the kind of volunteer work pursued indicates a high degree of awareness by those teachers who used their skills and knowledge to serve the community and the schools. This shows a sense of belonging to the school and community, which also should be reflected inside

the smaller community of the classroom. Not only do the teachers volunteer, but they also involve students in the community. This involvement takes three shapes: encouraging students to volunteer, joining students during site visits, and raising students' awareness of community-related issues. All of these methods for student involvement in the community, or what is commonly referred to as "service learning" (Abravanel, 2003), show benefits to both the school and community. Through service learning, students increase their sense of personal and social responsibility and are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. Students see themselves as positive contributors to their community, feeling they can make a difference.

It is worth reporting that almost all these teachers are practicing and communicating in similar ways, regardless of the subject or grade they teach. The only exceptions were when it came to involving students in the community and communicating with parents via technology; these two activities were done by teachers who taught grade four and higher.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of international research. Award-winning teachers realize the importance of keeping strong, close ties with their students' parents and the community; therefore, they connect with parents and the community in several ways. It is time to move into formalized partnerships with parents and the community and to work with other teachers in schools on parental and community involvement. Successful school-family partnerships require the sustained mutual collaboration, support, and participation of school staff and of families at home and at school in activities that can directly affect the success of children's learning.

It is also important that teachers create opportunities for parents and the community to be involved in the learning process. Parents and community members should not feel hesitant or unwelcome in the school. The schools most successful in engaging parents and other family members in support of their children's learning look beyond traditional definitions of parent involvement to a broader conception of parents as full partners in the education of their children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Finally, the study recommends that the challenges teachers face in their partnership with parents and the community are worth investigating in interviews with these teachers. In-depth qualitative studies are needed to understand and examine variations in parental and community involvement in schools across Jordan. Another interesting study might be to take an in-depth look at parents volunteering in school. If families are to work with schools as full partners in the education of their children, schools must provide them with the opportunities and support they need to succeed.

Endnotes

[1]For detailed information, please visit the Award's website: http://www.queenraniaaward.org

[2]JD 1= $1.40 U.S. Dollars. This might not be seen as a large amount of money, but for a teacher in Jordan, this almost equals the sum of one's annual salary.

[3]EduWave is an e-learning platform that is used in Jordanian K-12. It is an instructional content and learning management solution that caters to virtually every aspect of the educational cycle. Through EduWave, teachers have the ability to communicate their views and concerns directly to their students, colleagues, administration, and parents through e-mail and discussion forums.

[4] In 2007, there was a national campaign to make sure Petra, the ancient Nabatian city located in the south of Jordan, was selected as one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, and it was selected.

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It Takes a Village to Raise a Reader: Reflections on an Intergenerational Literacy Program

Ray Doiron and Jessie Lees

Abstract

Our research involved a community-school literacy initiative where seniors visit elementary schools to read with children. As we considered the residual data in our study, we were led to explore an emerging school-community relationship – a web of connection – being created by senior volunteers in the project. We discuss this aspect of our study in this article and consider the evolving role of senior volunteers in our society. We identify three characteristics of "elders" that emerge from several school literacy initiatives involving senior volunteers and consider how these are made evident in schools in our study. We also describe ways schools supported the project and suggest that these are important components of other school-community initiatives. We use the term "elders" rather than "seniors" to set our findings into the context of a long tradition of valued and valuable elder time.

Key Words: volunteers, seniors, senior citizens, literacy, caring, elders, wise, useful, schools, community, communities, connections, elementary children, students, reading, enjoyment, older adults, teachers, administrators, parents, intergenerational programs, Prince Edward Island, Canada

Background

> There is hardly an adult…within the community, who does not accept at first hand that each of us has to accept a personal responsibility for helping to educate young people. (Abbott & Ryan, 2000, p. 16)

This quote from Abbott and Ryan calls to mind the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child," in which we understand all members of the community share some responsibility for raising children. In the context of this article, we would revise that adage to read "It takes a village to raise a reader" and present to you some reflections on the impact a volunteer literacy program had on many schools in our home province. Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate) is an intergenerational literacy program where senior volunteers from the community come into elementary schools and read with/to elementary students in a safe and social environment. Students practice their literacy and social skills while developing their confidence and understanding that reading is an important part of life. Our research showed that these volunteers make significant contributions to students' literacy and social well-being, while engaging in meaningful work within their communities (Doiron & Lees, 2005). Project L.O.V.E., then, is not about teaching children *how* to read; this program is teaching children *about* reading – its value and importance.

Schools have a long tradition of involving community members/organizations in various mutually beneficial projects (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Saunders, 2000). Many of these initiatives take an intergenerational focus when parents engage in variety of volunteer services that can enhance their children's school experience while including community culture and values in the curriculum of the school. However, these initiatives are often limited to parents and their children and less frequently extend to programs built around the wider community and its senior members.

For over ten years, Project L.O.V.E. has brought together older volunteers and students in Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island, for the purpose of reading books and enjoying a shared literacy experience. The organization exists to promote literacy "as a positive and important lifetime habit" (PEI Volunteers for Literacy, 2007, ¶ 1). Beyond this, its mission is: (1) to provide students and teachers with a positive role model of older persons, thus encouraging a change of attitudes towards aging; (2) to develop opportunities for older persons to do volunteer work with students in a meaningful way; and (3) to facilitate intergenerational activities. This intergenerational literacy program has grown to include over 230 elder volunteers working in 34 schools across the province, an indication that the original "great idea" has grown to be an established and valued intergenerational literacy program.

Project L.O.V.E. has a full-time executive director who matches schools with volunteers and ensures that volunteers undergo the police checks required of everyone working with young children. She is also responsible for offering volunteer workshops on topics such as reading materials, learning disabilities, and ADD. Schools respond to volunteers by setting up a schedule, including each

volunteer for one or two days a week, providing accommodation, and arranging volunteer-teacher communication. They may assign a teacher/organizer to the Project. Different teachers use volunteers differently. Some send every student in class, in rotation, throughout the semester. Others identify children who would benefit most and send them consistently to the volunteer.

The program was positively evaluated in two reports (Bell & Conohan, 1998; Wood, 2003). One of these was designed to identify barriers to participation; the other was a general overview. Our inquiry was commissioned to examine literacy and social benefits for students, tease out effects on students' attitudes towards older people, and consider the personal, social, and health benefits for older volunteers.

Data Gathering and Two Themes

Surveys about their experiences with Project L.O.V.E. were completed by 212 volunteers and 72 teachers. Focus groups were selected in each category to be representative of larger and smaller schools, urban and rural settings, and geographic distribution across the province. Teacher focus group participants and volunteer participants were drawn from different schools, assuring representatives with mixed experiences. Altogether, we organized six focus group sessions with 32 volunteers and five focus groups with 27 classroom teachers. We also talked with five student groups totalling more than 50 children from grades 1-6. Students were asked to respond orally to five open-ended questions and to make two drawings – one of themselves working with the volunteer and one of their volunteer doing something she or he enjoyed outside school.

We have gained a wealth of information about the literacy and social benefits of Project L.O.V.E., as well as clear evidence that students are developing positive attitudes towards seniors and their lives. The literacy and social benefits are reported in the final report of the study (Doiron & Lees, 2005). These results point to the positive impact the shared reading experiences have on students' enjoyment of reading, practice of their reading skills, and growth in understanding of the value of reading. Socially, students and teachers valued the interactions with an older volunteer as students engaged in many positive discussions about the books they were reading as well as about their personal lives and the lives of seniors.

Our study has also given rise to some intriguing, emergent themes and reflections. The major theme of this paper emerged in our residual data when we began to consider Project L.O.V.E.'s role in strengthening community-school relations. This led us to explore the existence of, and the school-community implications of, an increasing presence of seniors in North American schools and

to link this with our sociocultural conception of literacy. The second theme of the paper was an intentional component of our research: a consideration of the schools' role in facilitating or restricting the involvement of senior volunteers. We will begin with our main theme.

The Increasing Presence of Senior Volunteers

Senior citizens are entering their local schools in increasing numbers and for a variety of reasons (Lipson, 1994; von Kreutzbruck, 2007). In Canada, they are recruited through organizations such as Volunteer Grandparents in British Columbia, United Grandparents in Ontario, and Project L.O.V.E. in Prince Edward Island. In the United States, in 1997, The Corporation for National Service called on members of the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to take part in a Seniors for Schools initiative, while a similar program, Generations Together was piloted in New York State in 1999. Different titles can reflect different purposes and organizational roots, but an examination of these various initiatives led to three major themes emerging around the role of senior volunteers: (1) portraying the image of "the caring grandparent;" (2) bringing the generations together in wise counsel; and (3) providing a direct, useful, and purposeful connection with schools. As we explore each theme, we will relate it to our research with Project L.O.V.E. and the work of Project L.O.V.E. volunteers.

The Caring Elder

Children's need for a loving relationship with an elder is a theme that runs through many senior volunteer programs we examined. Stetzner (2001) describes an intergenerational mentoring program in which senior volunteers share their experiences and expertise with elementary students and writes that "schools can…provide students with the love and attention they might not get elsewhere by inviting retired senior citizens into their classrooms" (p. 1). Drawing from the success of the Experience Corps program, Delisio (2004) writes that "volunteers dispense grandparent-levels of love" (¶ 5) and describes school children who delighted volunteers by asking, "Can I call you grandmom?" (¶ 28). The mission of another program, Volunteer Grandparents, is to create feelings of self-worth and personal competence in children.

The Caring Elder at School

Our strongest sense of Project L.O.V.E. volunteers was that they went into schools, and were accepted by schools, as caring adults. Their work was valuable, but we felt that it was unlike that of volunteers in the America Reads

project. Prince Edward Island schools were not expressing dismay at their inability to meet an urgent, nationally endorsed target of universal literacy. Educational goals were the same as those in U.S., but resources were thought to be adequate if not ideal. We were told that the school-related work of L.O.V.E. volunteers was useful because they were in a one-on-one situation, enlarged students' literacy experiences, and could reinforce the work of teachers. They made a significant contribution to students' literacy. Almost equally important, it seemed, was the volunteers' ability to create a comfortable out-of-classroom environment, enhance students' self-esteem by their praise and attentive listening, and give good readers a chance to show their skill.

The grandparent image was likely to appear in our conversations with teachers, volunteers, and students. It was always benign. Teachers spoke about children in small, nuclear families who had no grandparents or were far away from them. For these children, they said, Project L.O.V.E. volunteers filled an important gap. Volunteers told us about their own grandchildren and related these to students with whom they worked by comparing books being read, activities carried out, and attitudes. Sometimes, students filled a gap for volunteers whose grandchildren were far away, and students often said the volunteer was like a grandparent. In the small rural schools, it could be that one student's volunteer was actually another schoolmate's grandparent.

The importance of caring was evident from the high number of teachers whose students went to the L.O.V.E. volunteer in rotation. In these situations, a classroom teacher chose to send each student in the class, in turn, throughout the year rather than to follow the more typical method of identifying three or four children to send one at a time every week. We were given different reasons for this. Some teachers told us that it was to avoid singling out poor students and giving them a feeling of inadequacy. Others wanted all students to have the opportunity for individual attention from a caring adult. Some teachers believed that good readers needed to be able to "show off," to have their skills noticed and rewarded. The Project L.O.V.E. organization's practice of providing volunteers with stickers to give to students endorsed the reward and reinforcement aspect of volunteers' work, and stickers were mentioned with delight by every student focus group.

The Wise Elder

The passing-on, and sometimes the exchange, of knowledge or wisdom is a theme in many senior volunteer initiatives that focus on the coming together of generations. The International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs defines these initiatives as "social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations"

(Kaplan, 2001, p. 4). In a call for volunteers for Generations United, seniors are told that they can "teach children math or reading or work with them doing activities like fishing, cooking, music, or art" (p. 1), suggesting volunteers use their past skills and experiences to influence and support young learners.

The establishment of National Grandparents Day in the U.S. had to do with persuading grandchildren to "tap the wisdom and heritage their grandparents could provide" (National Grandparents Day Council, 2009, ¶ 1). Kornhaber (2004) supports his belief that grandparents are meant to act as spiritual guides by citing a grandmother who spoke about her concern for her grandchildren's happiness and souls. By contrast, she told him, she was preoccupied with her children's physical needs when she was primarily a mother.

The Wise Elder at School

As we explored the background and work experience of the volunteers in Project L.O.V.E. through our survey, we discovered that they had retired from a variety of meaningful jobs. They had been teachers, nurses, civil servants, homemakers, service-sector employees, and workers in traditional resource-based industries such as farming and fishing. They were generally an educated group with a variety of academic qualifications and professional certifications. Throughout their working lives, volunteers had been active in their churches, developed many hobbies, traveled, and generally kept learning. They wished to continue to remain active in their community during their retirement, and more than 60% reported they volunteered in other programs as well as in Project L.O.V.E.

Almost all volunteers said they were active readers; they loved reading and wanted children to develop the love and need for reading in their lives. They were also storytellers, often swapping stories with the children and developing a relationship as each gained trust in, and knowledge of, the other. Volunteers and children might begin a session by asking one another how their dog was doing or how they enjoyed last night's hockey game or if they watched a particular TV program. Volunteers might tell stories about the "old days" and how things had changed. Children might talk about their home and school experiences. These stories became a way of initiating the literacy session and provided a common bond and the foundation of a respectful relationship between child and volunteer. Teachers too commented on the value of having volunteers who provided an outlet for children to share their ideas and feelings.

We also explored how the school was tapping volunteers' background knowledge and life experiences in ways other than Project L.O.V.E. For example, were volunteers ever asked to be guest speakers on topics about which they were knowledgeable, or were they included in other aspects of the school

program? Did they participate as the "wise elder" who could share past experience in ways that would guide, inform, and educate the future generation? We found that volunteers were rarely invited to provide their expertise to the school. Only very occasionally were they asked to judge a school's Science Fair, speak on Veterans' Day, or demonstrate a handcraft. In fact, when interviewed, teachers were generally surprised by the idea and somewhat dismayed. They had never really thought of the volunteers beyond their work with Project L.O.V.E. The only situation in which there was recognition of volunteers' past experience was when the classroom teacher knew the volunteer was a retired teacher. Retired teachers were often welcomed because they were expected to understand how reading programs worked. However, we also noticed tensions. Some former teachers wanted to "teach" literacy – to focus on isolated skill practice rather than shared reading – and this is not the literacy method or perspective of today's classroom programs.

The Useful Elder

A third theme is the contribution that seniors can make to the educational system. Delisio (2004) articulates this when describing the Experience Corps in which "schools get free, reliable, dedicated assistance at a time when pressure to boost low-achieving students' performance is growing, and shrinking budgets are resulting in fewer classroom aides" (¶ 5). In an introductory letter to Generations Together, Charles Bohlen explains that senior volunteers encourage children to develop skills necessary for school success (New York State Rural Education Advisory Committee, 1999). As part of a national initiative, members of the FGP and RSVP programs in the U.S. were urged to volunteer in classrooms when the America Reads Challenge was issued in 1996. They were asked to help schools to reach nationally determined literacy goals for children.

Such intergenerational programs recognize the growing senior population as an untapped resource for cash-strapped schools which are struggling to meet ever-increasing demands. There is increasing realization that seniors constitute a new, rich reservoir of talent. In the Generations Together manual, for example, increasing life expectancy is linked to the use of older volunteers who are described as "a growing resource that can help schools and children achieve educational success" (p. 8). As pressure continues to build, it is likely we will see more schools facing the fact they are underfunded and need help. Increasingly, seniors are perceived as people who maintain an interest in contributing to their community and are able to give their time. They are potential "teaching assistants" who can supplement what teachers are doing. In other words, they can provide an essential service with little cost.

This phenomenon is often tied to literacy initiatives as evidenced in programs like Experience Corps and Generations Together, and it may be connected to differing viewpoints on what literacy is and how to best achieve it in schools. A literacy perspective focused on developing an isolated discreet set of skills requires more direct lessons, practice of individual skills, and drill exercises. In this view, seniors are potential monitors of skill practice who will keep the students on-task and focused on their skill development.

The Useful Elder at School

In the context of Project L.O.V.E., this pressure to view the elder in a utilitarian role was less evident. The volunteers were certainly seen as useful, but in ways that reinforced and enhanced what the classroom teacher was doing. They provided the rich, natural environment where literacy developed socially using oral language and personal meaning-making as the focus of their sessions with children. Teachers wanted their students to celebrate their literacy skills as they had developed to that point and to help emerging or struggling readers feel confident and grow in self-esteem. Vocabulary and decoding skills were developed incidentally to the whole reading event, rather than in preparation for, or in lieu of, an enjoyable reading experience with a caring adult.

A Web Crafted by Elders

While we found it useful and informative to examine the work of senior volunteers in Project L.O.V.E. through the lens of how intergenerational programs might see the senior as a caring, wise, and useful elder, we were also struck by how the relationship among the school, the community, and the volunteer was interconnected and intricately woven. Our analysis returned to the professional literature on how children develop their literacy, how schools teach literacy, and, from our survey and focus group data, how seniors in the Project L.O.V.E. program were woven into the picture. These caring, wise, and useful elders were helping to connect and interweave a community-school connection that contributed to children's literacy development.

Abbott and Ryan's (2000) opinion paper, "Community as the Web of Learning," advocates such school-community collaboration in support of children's learning. They describe initiatives in Princeton, New Jersey and Letchworth, England where educators recognize the "personal responsibility" all members of the community play in "helping to educate young people" (p. 16). Again, this triggered for us the notion that home, school, and community play an interconnected and vital role in helping all children learn to read, which we echo in the revised adage "It takes a village to raise a reader." Abbott and Ryan provided

us with a useful metaphor as we listened to participants' stories about the flow of seniors between community and school. We thought that these senior community members were weaving threads of connection that strengthened the school-community bond and might, in time, create a supportive web for children. First of all, volunteers increased their knowledge about the life of their schools and almost always expressed great admiration for teachers. Second, volunteers demonstrated their belief that community members have a role in and some responsibility for supporting children's education and well-being. Third, volunteers were teaching students about the pleasure of reading and its value and importance within the wider community and throughout their lives.

The Thread of Shared Knowledge

One thread is spun out of seniors' increasing knowledge about ways in which today's schools operate. We were told about "interaction with other people, especially children, making me more aware of trends and issues in education today." The changing nature of schools and the hard work of teachers were themes of discussion in every volunteer focus group. One volunteer, for example, told us that "working with Project L.O.V.E. has helped me realize what a difficult job teachers have in the classroom today." We heard that children seemed to have "so many things to cope with" and that this [volunteering] "gives us a greater respect for teachers and how they cope." In the words of yet another volunteer, "my eyes were opened to the many needs of young students and the tasks the teachers have to deal with, the many problems, both academic and social."

Their new knowledge gives volunteers an unusual perspective to share in other areas of their life in the community, and it "keeps them in touch with the school and community." In focus groups and interviews, volunteers spoke about encouraging friends to volunteer: "I have mentioned it to many people." They described conversations about their work with Project L.O.V.E., sometimes initiated by a child who "wants her Mum to come and meet you and then leaves you with a big hug." Many volunteers told us about hearing a shout from a child in the street or grocery store. Then a parent was brought to meet "my volunteer," to encounter their child's school in a different way, and to talk about reading. A comment that "she loves to read about puppies," for example, creates an occasion when the conversation is rooted in literacy as a positive and meaningful part of daily life.

Often, volunteers have retired from regular work. As they go out and about in the community during the day and talk about their work in school, their insights and experiences become part of the community's daily, ordinary exchange of news, giving literacy and schooling a new human face and fresh relevance.

The Thread of Community Responsibility

A second thread is that senior volunteers are conveying a belief about the community's role in supporting children's education and well-being. One volunteer articulated sentiments that were commonly heard in focus group sessions regarding motivations for participating: "a feeling of contributing to the community in which we live, a giving back for what we have obtained, having a small part in helping children feel better about themselves, keeping in touch with the younger generation." As seniors, these volunteers may have a special part to play. Shipman (1999), for example, writes that, "The intergenerational movement may be a conscious, planned effort to establish extended family relationships because of the gradual demise of the extended family structure" (p. 33). For Kerka (2003), children's relationships with elders strengthen social capital: the tangible and intangible resources – norms, networks, values, and trust – to which community members have access. She cites M. P. Some's belief that "the young child cannot feel secure if there is no elder whose silent presence gives him or her hope in life" (Kerka, 2003, p. 1).

The phrase "intergenerational capacity" is used in a document from the Office of Senior Victorians in Australia (2004). Volunteers' actions may be categorized as manifestations of social capital or intergenerational capacity, but essentially, the in-school presence of senior volunteers expresses a belief about community responsibility. Volunteers need not be related to students they meet. Most of them are not, and have not been, professional educators. They are, simply, members of the school's wider community who have been accepted into its classrooms with the task of modeling and celebrating the literacy act. The boundary between school and community becomes more permeable both because of volunteers' interest in children's learning and schools' acceptance of their support and because of children's awareness of the extended community interests of volunteers. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate some of the pictures children made when they were asked to draw pictures of their volunteers in activities outside school. There were scenes of volunteers gardening, reading, walking their dogs, making cookies, or watching TV. In some pictures, volunteers continued to give their time to benefit others. They donated blood, picked up litter, worked at other schools, and voted by computer for an animal shelter. Many volunteers were thought to enjoy life. They skipped with a rope, danced, got married, and took holidays in tropical places like Hawaii. The volunteers were part of the school life of the children, and the children saw them actively taking part in a wide range of activities in the community. As senior volunteers move between school and community, a second, strong thread is being woven, connecting community with school and school with community.

Figure 1: Grade 3 student drawing in response to prompt: Show what your volunteer likes to do outside school. "She's going to church."

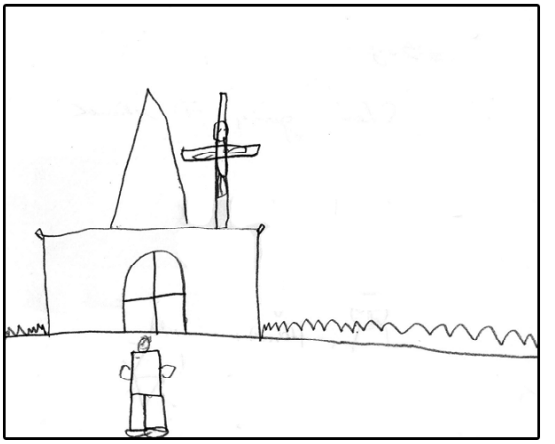
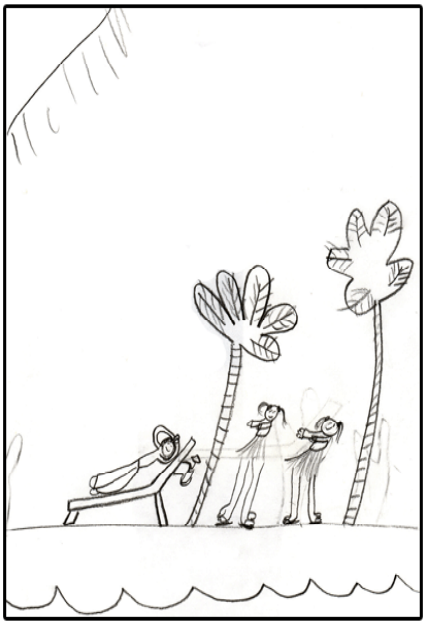


Figure 2: Grade 4 student drawing in response to the prompt: Show you and your volunteer reading.

Figure 3: Grade 5 student drawing in response to prompt: Show what your volunteer likes to do outside of school. "She's on a trip to Hawaii."



The Thread of Literacy Outreach

A third thread is formed because of the central place of literacy in volunteers' work and in community perceptions of that work. A "literacy as social practices" perspective (Gregory & Williams, 2000; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004) informed the Project L.O.V.E. study, and it played an important part in our reflections about school and community. In this perspective, our understanding of literacy is expanded beyond its traditional view as an individual attribute made up of a discreet set of linguistic skills towards a broader and more holistic perspective where the focus is on the social contexts in which literacy practices take place. Literacy achievement is regarded as the result of many complex and dynamic factors which cannot be reduced to simple/discreet measures of reading comprehension, vocabulary development, phonic skills, and other traditional skill-based tests. It is developed in a variety of sociocultural contexts that vary for individuals and must be nurtured constantly through modeling, scaffolding, and a growing personal identity as a reader/writer. One valuable literacy experience common to this holistic and social perspective is the book-sharing event. Shared reading provides very strong support for young learners (Cooper, 2004). As an adult and a child gather to read a book (or when an adult and a class of children gather to read a book), the experience is one which models literacy as a meaningful and enjoyable part of life, while nurturing and supporting students' literacy development.

Project L.O.V.E. volunteers are seen, then, as making an effective and important contribution to literacy development as they read to children or listen to them read. When they meet parents for casual chat, talk to friends about the books they are reading in school, and tell stories about children's interest in reading, their modeling of literacy as both meaningful and enjoyable moves into the world outside school. Beyond this, their own willingness to donate time and effort to the school is a tacit affirmation of their belief in the central importance of children's literacy development. This suggested to us that these three threads of volunteer knowledge, community responsibility, and literacy outreach have the potential to create a supportive web for the work of schools while strengthening school and community interconnections.

Effective Implementation: Facilitating School-Community Initiatives

Our experience with Project L.O.V.E. has been a rich source of ideas around the challenge of using community-based projects in ways that support and help existing school programs without adding to the already demanding life

of educators. All of our participants (teachers, volunteers, and students) agreed that a project in which seniors read with children in one-to-one, weekly sessions is a positive and worthwhile initiative. It has clear benefits in promoting and supporting students' literacy growth, plus it provides a nurturing and enjoyable social benefit when students share their ideas and feelings with a caring elder. As seniors connect their experiences and knowledge with the emerging future generation, they also benefit. More than 82% of volunteer respondents to our survey agreed with the phrase, "I feel that I am doing something useful in the world." Volunteers spoke about "feeling appreciated," "feeling good," and "feeling you are doing something worthwhile." Many describe their sense of satisfaction "in doing something useful" and say that they gain more than they give.

Principals, teachers, and volunteers were asked about positive and negative features of their Project L.O.V.E. experiences. Literacy and social benefits to children were primary elements of successful programs. However, smooth-running administration, easy communication, regular volunteer attendance, and, for volunteers, a sense of welcome and appreciation were all significant in ensuring success because these, in turn, had an impact on the reliability and quality of the students' experience. In summary, it's important for school leaders to: (1) focus on making the volunteers feel part of the school culture; (2) provide adequate in-house structure/organization for the operation of the program; and (3) build in mechanisms for teacher-volunteer communication.

School Culture

When asked how schools could make their work more satisfying, more than 80% of volunteers checked two prepared statements: "the principal knows my name" and "an event is held to recognize volunteers." In our focus groups, volunteers told stories of how the children came to know them and looked forward to their visits. They were welcomed at the school door, greeted when they showed up at the classroom door, and recognized in the hallways. Volunteers were known throughout the school even by teachers who did not work with them; many came to the staff room at recess and noon to socialize with teachers and each other; they had an assigned place to work and, sometimes, they wore a special smock or name tag that identified their role in the school. All of these things gave the volunteer an inclusive feeling. If they were missing, volunteers could feel in the way and a "bit of a nuisance." It is part of the school's responsibility to take this aspect of the program seriously. These seniors were not demanding, nor did they have high expectations, but they did hope to be included and made to feel welcome.

All schools held some recognition event for the senior volunteers. This took the form of special school assemblies, a Volunteer Tea in the spring, or the individual recognition of volunteers at school closing events. The rewards were simple certificates and perhaps a small lunch, but their significance lay simply in the existence of events that publicly signaled the value of having seniors from the community working in the school.

In-School Organization

As part of building a successful Project L.O.V.E. program, the principal requested that a staff member take on the role of coordinator. This person acted as chief contact in the school for individual volunteers and for the director of the Project L.O.V.E. organization. He or she also connected volunteers with teachers who wanted a volunteer, managed procedures for getting permission for students to take part in the program, held orientation events to welcome new volunteers and show them the routines for that school, and made sure that volunteers were included in social events and closing events for the year.

Classroom teachers took differing initiatives in directing the work of volunteers. In highly successful programs, the teachers were very specific about what they wanted volunteers to do each week. They chose a book for the reading time, assigned a small activity for the volunteer to lead, and provided a way for the volunteer to record what they did and to write in any comments they wanted to make about the session. Some schools had a volunteer book bag in which books, activities, and recording sheets were kept for the volunteers to pick up when they arrived. In other cases, teachers did little to provide direction for the volunteers or to communicate directly with them and often reported they even "forgot they were coming," suggesting they liked the idea of the program, but they needed some school-based support to make the most effective use of the volunteers.

Teacher-Volunteer Communication

It is not surprising that the successful implementation of an intergenerational literacy initiative like Project L.O.V.E. would depend on good communication. We found several indications that schools where communication was regular and intentional were more satisfied with the program. The need for communication was evident in two ways: teacher-volunteer communication and volunteer-volunteer interaction.

There were not many opportunities for teachers and volunteers to meet and talk about the children and volunteers' work with them. Meetings happened most often in the hallway, at a recess break, or for a few minutes outside the classroom door. Volunteers felt the need to share with teachers some of the

social issues that arose in sessions, for example, when the child seemed upset that day or troubled by something. They also wanted to share with teachers the positive things that were happening, perhaps not after every session, but at least periodically while they were working with the students. Classroom teachers seemed to put work into meeting with volunteers at the start of each year, but otherwise they relied on volunteers to seek them out or use a tracking tool to communicate details about individual students in individual sessions. Tracking tools took several forms: a single sheet with separate categories for response, a scribbler to record anecdotal comments, or tracking sheets designed by the Project L.O.V.E. director. These were essential tools for ongoing communication between teachers and volunteers. It was also important for the school-based coordinator to call one or two meetings during the year when teachers and volunteers could meet to discuss children and what was happening in the sessions.

An interesting aspect of our focus groups with volunteers was how participants found the focus group session itself enjoyable and valuable. Many said they rarely had time to discuss their sessions with other volunteers and that it was reassuring to know "they were doing okay" in their work with students. It was clear that volunteers would benefit if they were enabled to meet with their fellow volunteers and discuss "how it was going" in their school and with their children. They could share their knowledge about reading and helping children enjoy it, learn from others, and perhaps feel more confident in what they were accomplishing. We suggest that organizations such as Project L.O.V.E. consider arranging informal occasions for volunteers to meet and talk about their work.

The Uniqueness of Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island is the smallest province in Canada and it has a large number of close-knit rural communities. Many small communities were involved in Project L.O.V.E., so that the likelihood of casual volunteer-student encounters was unusually high. Literacy and social benefits for students, however, have nothing to do with community size, while the advocacy role of volunteers and their more intimate knowledge of schools are also elements that would transfer to larger, more dispersed communities. One other consideration for us as educators is that the population of healthy, active, and articulate seniors is growing in every part of Canada. We would be wise to enlist these elders in the service of building our children's literacy and social confidence and to foster wider knowledge of the daily lives and issues of people in our schools. If we do not, we will lose a tremendous potential resource and a strong source of advocacy.

A Closing Thought

An exciting part of qualitative research is the way in which researchers are able to remain open to emerging themes and ideas that enhance or extend their exploration of the original research questions. In our inquiry, we noticed that schools integrated the Project L.O.V.E. program in ways that reflected their own culture and philosophy. Each school was different, but in every school, teachers expressed an overwhelming respect for senior volunteers and their willingness to spend time reading with children. We began to realize that the apparently simple activity of reading a book to/with a child was a powerful and meaningful way for seniors from the community to become part of the school culture. As we talked to volunteers, teachers, and children, we also recognized that senior volunteers were extending the school culture back out into the community. Senior volunteers exemplified the idea that "it takes a village to raise a reader." They demonstrated their belief in the community's responsibility for children's education by their practice, and they created webs of connection to motivate and engage others. Jenks (2000) gives powerful expression to our emergent ideas:

> This elder time becomes a stage in life revered and honoured by others and used powerfully in service and to help people do what is right for the benefit of future generations. (¶ 8)

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Parenting Classes, Parenting Behavior, and Child Cognitive Development in Early Head Start: A Longitudinal Model

Mido Chang, Boyoung Park, and Sunha Kim

Abstract

This study analyzed Early Head Start Research and Evaluation (EHSRE) study data, examining the effect of parenting classes on parenting behaviors and children's cognitive outcomes. The study analyzed three sets of dependent variables: parental language and cognitive stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and the Bayley Mental Development Index (MDI) of children. The analysis results, using Longitudinal Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) and multivariate analyses, revealed that parents who attended parenting classes stimulated their children's language and cognitive development and provided educational activities more than did parents who did not participate in parenting classes. The cognitive outcomes (the Bayley MDI scores) of the children whose parents attended parenting classes were significantly higher than those of the children of parents who had never attended these classes.

Key Words: Early Head Start, parenting classes, behavior, child cognitive development, longitudinal model, mothers, preschool, parent-child interactions

Introduction

Parental involvement in children's education has been an important issue because it is a critical resource for children's success in school. Research has consistently indicated that parental involvement relates positively to school

achievement. Many educational practitioners are making an effort to evoke parents' involvement in parenting workshops, volunteering in class activities, or various other opportunities. These efforts lead to better behavioral and academic outcomes for children (Bailey, Silvern, & Brabham, 2004; Flouri, 2004; Li, 2006; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Senechal, 2006; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Yan & Lin, 2005). Early studies on parental involvement in preschool programs have also indicated its benefits on children's cognitive and social development. When mothers participated in a program to improve verbal interaction, preschool children of low-income families showed significant cognitive development (Madden, Levenstein, & Levenstein, 1976); when mothers participated in parent-child intervention programs, 1- or 2-year-old toddlers displayed substantially improved cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Pfannenstiel and Seltzer (1985) also showed that preschoolers whose parents participated in a parent education program displayed significantly higher intelligence, language ability, and social development.

The findings of early studies substantiated the importance of intervention programs that first encourage parents to participate in parental education programs and later guide them in daily practice of their gained knowledge and skills to promote their children's cognitive and social development. Despite the proven importance of parent education, recent studies on the effects of parental classes in preschool or childcare programs have been under-represented. Moreover, research on the impact of parenting classes for children who are preschool age or younger have been less studied than those for school-age children.

This study examines the effects of parental involvement for infant and toddler preschoolers from low-income families by using Early Head Start (EHS) data. EHS constitutes a nationally representative dataset which contains variables of various family backgrounds and types of parental involvement. Among the types of parental involvement, we particularly paid attention to the effects of parenting classes on parental language and cognitive stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and children's cognitive outcomes.

The study was guided by the following research hypotheses:

- The parents who participated in parenting classes from EHS would demonstrate more parental language and cognitive stimulation, as measured by home observation and by video recording, than those who did not.
- The parents who participated in parenting classes from EHS would demonstrate more parent-child interactive activities than those who did not.
- The children of parents who participated in parenting classes from EHS would demonstrate higher scores on the cognitive evaluation.

Theoretical Background

Parental Involvement and Parenting Classes

Early studies on preschool programs emphasized parental involvement on the basis of its benefits for preschool children's cognitive development. Bronfenbrenner (1974), in a review paper based on nine empirical studies examining parent-child intervention programs, asserted that intervention programs encouraging parental involvement led to substantial cognitive development of toddlers and preschool children. Bronfenbrenner also highlighted the importance of a parent intervention program when children are very young by showing that gains in children's IQ from the effects of parent intervention programs were highest when the children were one or two years of age, while the effects were weak if children were as old as five years.

In a similar vein, Madden et al. (1976) showed significant cognitive development of preschool children from low-income families after two years of their mothers' engagement in a verbal interaction modeling program. Specifically, through this intervention, mothers were taught to interact verbally while playing with their children to promote the children's intellectual and socioemotional development. Pfannenstiel and Seltzer (1985) also found that preschoolers whose parents participated in a similar parent education program (Parents as Teachers) showed, at the end of the program, significantly higher intelligence, language ability, and social development in comparison with national norms. Parents in the program learned how to facilitate the cognitive, social, linguistic, and physical development of their children from the time of prenatal development to the age of three.

Similarly, recent studies have evidenced the positive effects of Parents as Teachers (PAT) Programs on a large scale (Pfannenstiel, Seitz, & Zigler, 2003; Zigler, Pfannenstiel, & Seitz, 2008). Pfannenstiel et al. (2003) studied a PAT program for 2,375 public kindergarten school children in the state of Missouri. The program in their study was designed in such a way that PAT-certified educators taught parents to build knowledge according to their children's developmental stages and to highlight the importance of parental involvement to build solid parent-child relationships. The unique feature of their PAT program was a home visit and customized program component to cater to the needs of individual children. For example, the educators partnered with parents to promote better understanding of various children's developmental issues and to provide solutions for them. The PAT program was successful in helping parents, especially from low-income families, and in getting their children ready for school. Parents who attended the PAT program were more actively engaged in promoting their children's cognitive development: they read books to their

children more frequently and enrolled their children more in preschool programs than did those who had not been in the PAT program.

Zigler et al. (2008) extended their earlier study of the PAT program by collecting longitudinal data on 5,721 children's school performance from kindergarten to third grade. The authors confirmed the positive effect of the PAT program on children's school readiness and academic performance at third grade. Furthermore, parents who attended the PAT program demonstrated a great deal of improvement in parenting practices, which was important for influencing school readiness and the academic performance of their children. Also, combined with a quality preschool program, the PAT program was effective in narrowing the gap between poor and affluent children in terms of school readiness and academic performance.

Contrary to the results of the studies cited above, some studies have not indicated the same positive effects. Specifically, even the above-mentioned programs did not consistently show the same results. For example, when Madden, O'Hara, and Levenstein (1984) examined the effects of a mother-child verbal interaction program at a three-year, post-program evaluation, they could not find the same significant cognitive child development that their earlier study found. Furthermore, when Scarr and McCartney (1988) implemented in Bermuda the same verbal interaction modeling program previously used by Madden, O'Hara, and Levenstein, they were not able to find a significant effect on preschooler cognitive development, even immediately after the program. Similarly, when Owen and Mulvihill (1994) evaluated the Parents as Teachers program using a statistically robust method—a quasi-experimental longitudinal design—they reported no significant difference in children's outcomes between experimental and control groups. On the same note, based on their analysis of previous early intervention research, White, Taylor, and Moss (1992) concluded that there was no compelling evidence to prove the significant effects of parental involvement. Instead, they called attention to a need for a specific direction in parental involvement and a systematic exploration regarding which kinds of parental involvement are effective for which children.

Recent studies relating to parental involvement have diverged from early studies that focused on the effects of parent classes for children with behavior problems from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Many studies have been conducted to examine the effects of a parenting class based on the Incredible Years Program and have found a positive effect on decreasing behavior problems. The Incredible Years offers 12 weekly parent classes and teaches parents how to discipline and parent children, in addition to promoting children's social skills. By implementing the Incredible Years for parents with low income, Gross et al. (2003) found that toddlers whose parents attended parent

classes showed a greater improvement in their behaviors when compared to other toddlers whose parents did not attend. Also, by extending the Incredible Years Program to two more years to promote a better transition from preschool to kindergarten, Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2001) showed a greater conduct improvement both at home and in school among children of mothers who attended parent classes. Hartman, Stage, and Webster-Stratton (2003) implemented advanced components, teaching interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills along with the basic components of the Incredible Years Program, to serve parents of children with behavior and/or attention problems. The authors found that children whose parents attended parent classes decreased their conduct and/or attention problems. When the Incredible Years was implemented in England, Jones, Daley, Hutchings, Bywater, and Eames (2007) found that preschoolers with both conduct and attention problems showed greater improvement if their parents attended parent classes, when compared to other preschoolers.

Similar to the Incredible Years Program, another clinical parenting class program has proved to have similar positive effects on improving conduct disorders in children. The Parenting the Strong-Willed Child (PSWC) class offers six weekly sessions and teaches principles and strategies for parenting children with conduct disorders. By providing the PSWC program to parents of children with behavior disorders, Conners, Edwards, and Grant (2007) reported that children showed less intensity and frequency of disorders in comparison with other children whose parents did not attend the classes. By referring to other empirical studies that showed the same positive effects of a PSWC class, Long (2007), who developed the PSWC program, reported the benefits of these clinical parent classes. Beyond discussing current trends in parenting classes, Long also emphasized the need to benefit "average" parents who do not have children with serious problems.

Parental Involvement in Head Start

Since 1965 when Head Start was launched for the first time, parental involvement has been a critical factor in the program's success. The Head Start Program Performance Standards, which are mandatory for these programs, require parent participation in multiple ways, such as policymaking and operations, curriculum development, parenting classes, home visits, and volunteering in the classroom (Head Start Bureau, 1998). Because Head Start believes that parents are the primary and most important resources to support children's development and learning, the regulation requires that

> Head Start agencies must provide opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational

> and developmental needs and activities of their children and to share concerns about their children with program staff. [Head Start Program Performance Standards 1304.40 (e) (3)]

While the regulation requires Head Start facilities to provide opportunities for parental involvement in the program, it also allows each program autonomy in planning and implementing parental involvement to meet the different needs and goals of the children and families involved in the program [Head Start Program Performance Standards 1304.40 (a)]. Parenting classes are one of the common types of parental involvement in Head Start. These classes cover various topics, such as early childhood education curriculum, behavior guidance, health and nutrition, preventing violence, early literacy skills and activities, and transition to kindergarten (Head Start Bureau, 1993).

The implementation of Early Head Start (EHS) was largely attributed to the studies of brain functioning for infants and toddlers during the 1980s and 1990s and their emphasis on the importance of cognitive development of young children. In particular, a Carnegie Corporation research report, "The Quiet Crisis," strongly influenced the launch of EHS by warning, "American children under the age of three and their families are in trouble, and their plight worsens everyday" (1994). In response to this report, it was recommended that the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion be established to serve families with children under the age of three. Later, Congress expanded EHS to serve pregnant women and low-income families with infants and toddlers (Early Head Start, 2000). Like Head Start, Early Head Start also mandates parental involvement but gives local programs leeway in planning and implementation.

Methods

Analyses

The main statistical tools for this study were a two-level longitudinal hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and a multivariate analysis. The HLM analyzed the longitudinal effects of parenting classes on parental cognitive stimulation and children's cognitive development (Bayley MDI scores) after controlling for the effects of the other covariates using three waves of data. The multivariate analyses examined the effects of parenting classes on the parental cognitive and language stimulation and the parent-child interactive activities at 36 months of age.

Multilevel analysis, also referred to as hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), is a statistical methodology for examining hierarchical or nested data. For example, children who are nested in a particular school tend to have more aspects

in common than do children from different schools. Multilevel analysis takes into account correlations caused by sharing common factors among children in the same school (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Analyzing longitudinal data through a multilevel analysis offers researchers great advantages. This approach has been shown to overcome several methodological limitations associated with traditional repeated measures designs: it is free from the strong assumption (compound symmetry) of repeated measures; it allows for unbiased parameter estimation, even when the data show a high degree of correlation within the levels; and it is highly flexible with respect to the number and spacing of observations, in the sense that it does not require equal spacing or an equal number of observations. This flexibility makes longitudinal multilevel analysis a breakthrough when it comes to the handling of missing data, which has been a major problem for longitudinal data analysis (Hox; Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998; Lee, 2000; Raudenbush & Bryk).

The two-level HLM models were analyzed using the two longitudinal models: In the first longitudinal model, the association of the three waves of parenting classes and the composite score of parental cognitive stimulation was examined; in the second longitudinal model, the relation between the three waves of parenting classes and children's MDI scores was explored. We used the three waves of parenting classes by specifying the variable as a time-varying variable. In this way, we were able to examine the direct effect of parenting classes on dependent variables as well as the longitudinal effect.

The HLM model at level-1 measured the initial score and change (growth) rate of a dependent variable, and the longitudinal effect of a parenting class on the dependent variable. Level-2 was designed to show the interaction effects of the individual variables with the change rate of a dependent variable and a parenting class (*ParClass)* only at the initial point (intercept). (See Appendix A for the detailed model specifications of level-1 and level-2; all Appendices available from the authors upon request; contacts are at the end of this article.)

The multivariate analyses were also adopted to examine the effects of parenting classes on the two forms of parental cognitive and language stimulation and the five parent-child interactive activities. The multivariate analyses were a suitable statistical tool due to multiple dependent variables and their correlated aspects (two types of parental cognitive and language stimulation and five parent-child interactive activities) within each set.

The two forms of parental cognitive and language stimulation were parents' language and cognitive stimulation by Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) and parents' cognitive stimulation by video recording of parent-child interaction at 36 months of age. The five activities were measured as parent-child play, parent-child outside activities, reading once or more per day, reading bedtime routine, and reading frequency.

Data and Variables

This study used the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation (EHSRE) database, which contains a three-year, large-scale data, allowing for investigation of the longitudinal effects of parenting classes on parenting behaviors and children's cognitive development. In 1996, the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) initially funded 143 Early Head Start programs. Among those programs, only 17 programs were selected for an evaluation and included in the EHSRE to have a balance of rural/urban locations and racial/ethnic composition. The data collection method of the EHSRE was the random assignment of children and their families to the Early Head Start program (EHS) and to the control group at the onset of programs. While the EHS group received planned services, the children of the control group could not receive any services from Head Start until the child reached the age of 3, although they could receive other services in the community. At the design stage of evaluation, 1,513 families were assigned to the EHS, while 1,488 families were assigned to the control group. After an initial adjustment, the EHS data was composed of 1,503 children of the program group and 1,474 children of the control group (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2004).

As stated in the purpose of the study, the chief predictor was the degree of participation of mothers in parenting classes. The variable of parenting classes in the study indicated whether mothers attended parenting classes at 6, 15, and 26 months after enrollment. Although the EHSRE used random assignments for the Early Head Start programs, it did not employ random assignments with the parenting classes. As shown in Table 1, the frequencies of mothers who participated in parenting classes from the control and the EHS were quite different, but they showed constant participation rates over the time. We used the three waves of parenting class variables by specifying them as a time-varying variable. In other words, at each wave the effect of parenting classes was differently associated with the dependent variables, and those different associations revealed the longitudinal effect.

To reduce the selection bias for the effect of parenting classes, which was caused by non-randomization, we controlled for the effects of important predictor variables that could significantly influence the cognitive development of children: teenage status of the mother at random assignment (*Teenmom*), mother's education (*Momedu*), mother's primary language (*Momlang*), adult male in the household at baseline (*Madult*), mother's previous experience of Head Start programs (*PreHead*), family poverty level (*Povty*), child's gender (*Gender*), child's age at random assignment (*Age*), and the program status (*Hdst*).

Table 1. Frequency Table for Participants of Parenting Classes Classified by Three Waves and Program Status (EHS vs. Control Groups)

		Parenting Class		Total
		No	Yes	
6 months after enrollment in EHS	Control	827	182	1009
	EHS	613	461	1074
15 months after enrollment in EHS	Control	875	134	1009
	EHS	633	442	1075
26 months after enrollment in EHS	Control	872	138	1010
	EHS	687	384	1071

We analyzed three sets of dependent variables: parent's language and cognitive stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and Bayley MDI scores. The first set of dependent variables, parent's language and cognitive stimulation, were used to explore the relation between parental education and the quality of parent-child interactions, which can be critical factors in promoting a child's cognitive development. The two raw scores (parent's language and cognitive stimulation as determined by home observation and by video recording) were used as dependent variables in the multivariate analyses. We also created a composite variable by combining the two variables for the longitudinal analysis. The composite variable was created by converting the two raw scores into standardized scores and combining them into one. As the second set of dependent variables, we used five parent-child interactive activities: parent-child play, parent-child outside activities, reading once or more per day, reading bedtime routine, and reading frequency at 36 months of age by specifying another set of dependent variables. Finally, we also paid attention to the Bayley MDI scores at the ages of 14, 24, and 36 months as dependent variables for a longitudinal analysis to examine the effects of parenting classes on the degree of children's mental development.

Results

Our data analysis included descriptive statistics and correlations to determine the bivariate relations among all variables in the first step. The total number of children in the EHS database was 2,977; the total number of mothers who participated in the study was 2,960. Among those, 643, 576, and 522 mothers participated in the 6-, 15-, and 26-month parenting classes, respectively (See Table 1 for detailed information). When we looked at the total

number of participants, 665 mothers from the program and 300 mothers from the control group participated in one or more parenting class.

As a preliminary analysis, we also performed a bivariate correlation whose results revealed that parenting classes had significant connections with a child's cognitive development indices, justifying the importance of further advanced analyses. The correlation of parenting classes with Bayley MDI at 36 months was 0.127 ($p < 0.01$), with home language cognitive stimulation being 0.169 ($p < 0.01$), and with parent cognitive stimulation being 0.121 ($p < 0.01$), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of Parenting Classes and All Nine Dependent Variables at 36 months

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Parenting Class	—	.127**	.169**	.121**	.106**	.057*	.126**	.136**	.133**
2. Bayley MDI Score		—	.364**	.277**	.133**	-.033	.159**	.197**	.222**
3. HOME: Language & Cognitive Stimulation			—	.296**	.383**	.169**	.288**	.357**	.440**
4. Video: Parent Cognitive Stimulation				—	.129**	.056*	.146**	.132**	.172**
5. Parent-Child Play					—	.389**	.231**	.555**	.691**
6. Parent-Child Outside Activities						—	.083**	.203**	.256**
7. Reading Bedtime Routine							—	.410**	.384**
8. Read Daily								—	.817**
9. Reading Frequency									—
N	2081	1658	1861	1658	2076	2061	2099	2072	2072
Mean	.25	90.63	10.49	3.77	4.36	2.86	.31	.54	4.53
SD	.434	12.634	2.018	1.125	.850	.702	.462	.498	1.143

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

The second analysis was on the longitudinal effect of parenting classes on the composite score of parental cognitive and language stimulation. The effect was significant, having the coefficient of 0.246 ($p < 0.01$) as shown in Table 3. In other words, when mothers participated in parenting classes, the mothers showed increased cognitive and language stimulation over the years.

Table 3. The HLM Analysis Result Using Composite Scores of Parental Cognitive and Language Stimulation at 14, 24, and 36 Months as Dependent Variables

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	SE	T-Ratio	DF	*p*
Initial Score	-2.442	0.166	-14.737	1096	0.000
Growth Effect	0.290	0.027	10.731	1105	0.000
Parenting Class Effect on Growth	0.246	0.061	3.996	2598	0.000

We performed additional analyses to examine the effects of parenting classes on the two separate measures of parental cognitive stimulation. The result of multivariate analysis presented in Table 4 indicates that the effects of parenting classes were pronounced for both HOME language cognitive stimulation ($F = 14.159$, $p < 0.01$) and video parent cognitive stimulation ($F = 12.483$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, when mothers went to parenting classes, increased parental cognitive stimulations in parent-child interactions were noticed over time. This finding shares the observations from early literature (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Madden et al., 1976). Specifically, our results verified the results of Madden et al. (1976), in which the authors showed that parents of low-income families demonstrated improved verbal interaction with children during play time when they attended an intervention program. In addition, our result is a new addition to the literature in terms of the longitudinal effects of parenting classes on the role of parental behavior in helping foster children's cognitive and language development. Figure 1 highlights the effect of parenting classes on parent cognitive stimulation by HOME, while Figure 2 displays the effect by video observation.

Figures 1 & 2. Relationships Between Parenting Classes and Language & Cognitive Stimulation by Observation and by Video Recording at 36 Months

Figure 1. HOME Observation

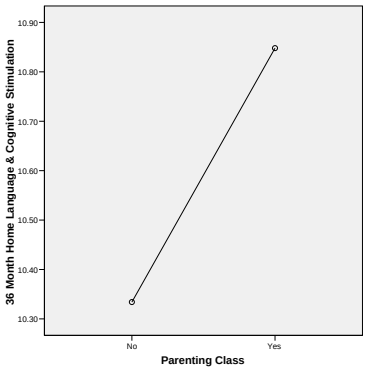


Figure 2. Video Recoding

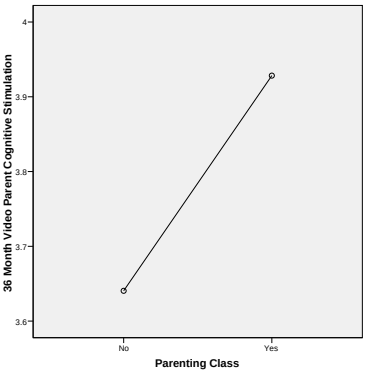


Table 4. The Multivariate Analysis Result Using Language and Cognitive Stimulation by HOME Observation and by Video Recording at 36 Months as Dependent Variables

Source	Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Parenting Class	H. L. & C. S.[1]	45.971	1	45.971	14.159	.000	.151
	V. L. & C. S.[2]	14.416	1	14.416	12.483	.000	.082
Error	H. L. & C. S.[1]	2636.386	812	3.247			
	V. L. & C. S.[2]	937.718	812	1.155			
Total	H. L. & C. S.[1]	3106.049	822				
	V. L. & C. S.[2]	1021.193	822				

[1]Home Language & Cognitive Stimulation
[2]Video Language & Cognitive Stimulation

In the next analysis, we paid attention to the effects of parenting education on parent-child activities. As Table 5 and Figures 3-7 show, the results of multivariate analysis demonstrate that participation in parenting classes resulted in a statistically significant increase in parent-child activities, with the exception of parent-child outside activity ($F = .125$, $p > 0.05$). Specifically, parent-child play ($F = 10.121$, $p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.031$), reading bedtime routine ($F = 17.272$, $p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.069$), reading daily ($F = 21.820$, $p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.060$), and reading frequency ($F = 20.918$, $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = 0.062$) showed significant results with effect sizes ranging from 0.031 to 0.069. Importantly, three reading activities showed significant relationships with parenting education, although the effect

sizes were small. Our Figures 3-7 also confirmed the multivariate results, with increased activities patterns when mothers participated in a parenting class, although careful interpretation is required because of their effect sizes.

Along with results on increased cognitive stimulation, the results of increased parent-child activities by those participating in a parenting class also support previous research findings (Bailey, Silvern, & Brabham, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Senechal, 2006; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Yan & Lin, 2005).

Table 5. The Multivariate Analysis Results Using Parent-Child Activities as Dependent Variables at 36 Months

Source	Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Parenting Class	Parent-Child Play	7.262	1	7.262	10.121	.002	.031
	Parent-Child Outside Activities	.064	1	.064	.125	.724	.001
	Reading Bedtime Routine	3.550	1	3.550	17.272	.000	.069
	Read Daily	5.130	1	5.130	21.820	.000	.060
	Reading Frequency	26.785	1	26.785	20.918	.000	.062
Error	Parent-Child Play	741.907	1034	.718			
	Parent-Child Outside Activities	525.707	1034	.508			
	Reading Bedtime Routine	212.527	1034	.206			
	Read Daily	243.087	1034	.235			
	Reading Frequency	1324.024	1034	1.280			
Total	Parent-Child Play	765.944	1044				
	Parent-Child Outside Activities	531.084	1044				
	Reading Bedtime Routine	228.322	1044				
	Read Daily	258.712	1044				
	Reading Frequency	1411.680	1044				

Figures 3-7. Relationships Between Parenting Classes and Parent-Child Activities at 36 Months

Figure 3. Parent-Child Play

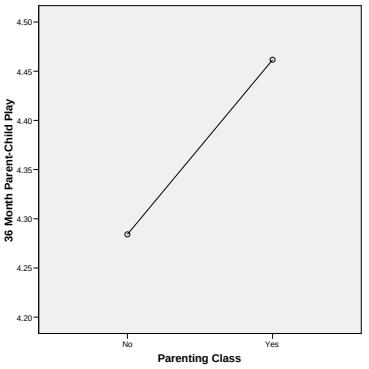


Figure 4. Parent-Child Ouside Activities

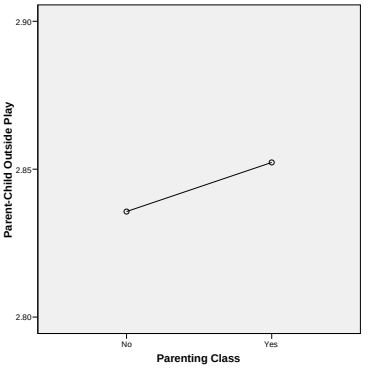


Figure 5. Reading Bedtime Routine

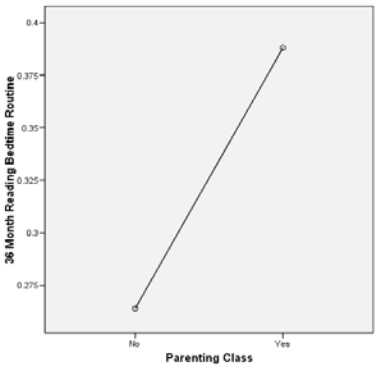


Figure 6. Read Daily

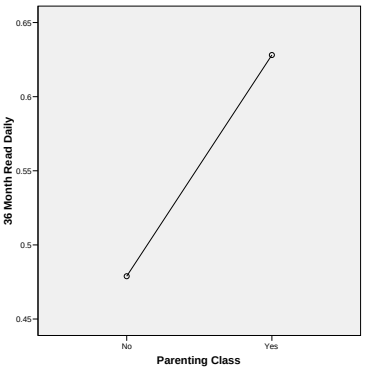
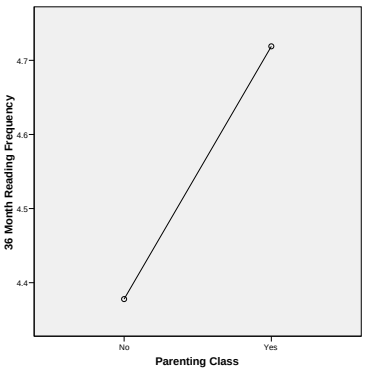


Figure 7. Reading Frequency



In the last analysis, we analyzed the effect of parenting classes on children's Bayley MDI scores using a longitudinal hierarchical linear modeling. Our analysis revealed that the children whose mothers had a parenting class demonstrated significantly higher MDI scores than those whose mothers had not gone to parenting class (β_{20} = 1.438, p < 0.05). To present a clear understanding, we present only the effects of the initial score, the growth rate, and a parenting class on children's Bayley MDI score in Table 6. The effects of other independent variables and the other statistical results of the full model are presented in Appendix B

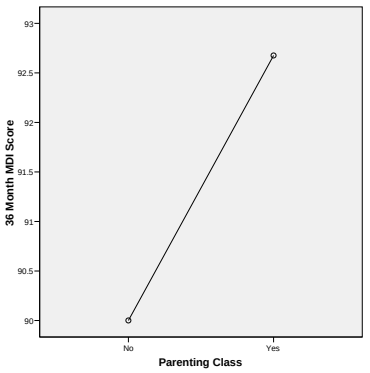
(all Appendices available from authors upon request). Figure 8 also illustrates the difference of children's Bayley MDI scores from the two parent groups.

Although this significant result is the final objective of providing parenting classes for the parents of low-income families, it takes extra caution to interpret the results because there may be other factors that determine improved cognitive development of children which we did not consider in the analysis. Despite our caution in asserting a direct association between the effects of parenting classes and children's cognitive development, this result shares similar findings with prior studies which showed parenting classes as being significantly associated with children's intellectual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Madden et al., 1976; Pfannenstiel & Seltzer, 1985).

Table 6. The HLM Analysis Result Using Bayley MDI Scores at 14, 24, and 36 Months as Dependent Variables

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	SE	T-Ratio	DF	*p*
Initial Score	85.366	1.392	61.312	1109	0.000
Growth Effect	-3.589	0.248	-14.488	2566	0.000
Parenting Class Effect on Growth	1.438	0.567	2.537	2566	0.012

Figure 8. Relationship Between Parenting Classes and Child's MDI Score at 36 Mos.



Lastly, we paid attention to the effects of the variables we controlled for (covariates) in examining the effects of parenting classes on the three sets of dependent variables. As stated in the methods section, we controlled for the effects of the variables because they could influence the outcome variables and thus confound the effects of parenting classes. At the same time, they could be important variables to consider. Our analyses allowed us to see the results of the covariates along with the interpretation of parenting classes. For longitudinal and multivariate analyses for Bayley MDI scores, the effects of the teenage status of the mother (*Teenmom*), mother's education (*Momedu*), adult male in the household (*Madult*), and child's gender (*Gender*) were significant. High child Bayley MDI scores were observed when the mother was a teenager or had higher education; the child was a girl; or a male adult lived in the household. Both longitudinal and multivariate analyses for

parental cognitive stimulation indicated that the effects of the mother's teenage status (*Teenmom*), mother's education (*Momedu*), mother's primary language (*Momlang*), family poverty level (*Povty*), and child's gender (*Gender*) were significant. For the multivariate analysis using parent-child interactive play, the mother's education (*Momedu*) and mother's primary language (*Momlang*) were significant predictors as shown in Appendix C. The detailed information is presented in Appendices B and C (available from the authors upon request).

Discussion

Overall Findings

The long-term goal of this study is to provide sound, empirical research findings on the effects of active parental involvement in children's cognitive development and educational success for low-income families and to support parental outcomes and child well-being. Keeping the long-term goal in mind, the stated short-term objectives of the paper were to investigate the effects of parenting classes on parental cognitive and language stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and children's cognitive development in Early Head Start participants. As Early Head Start has mandated multi-dimensional parental involvement, such as class volunteering, council meetings, staff-parent conferences, and parenting classes, the study considered parental involvement as an important determinant to change parental behavior and, in turn, to boost the cognitive development of children from low SES families. The study selected the effect of parenting classes as a main predictor variable among available variables of parental involvement. It was guided by prior research in which parenting classes made a direct impact on parental behaviors and children's cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Madden et al., 1976), but this type of investigation has been under-represented in recent research. The findings of our study can be summarized as follows: when compared to the parents who did not participate in parenting classes, those who attended parenting classes: (1) increased their children's cognitive and language stimulation over the years; (2) engaged in more parent-child activities such as parent-child play, reading bedtime routines, reading daily, and reading frequency; and (3) had children with higher scores in the Bayley assessment over the three waves.

As shown in the summary of our findings, we supported all three hypotheses with our analysis results, although they show small effect sizes. Thus, our study mirrored prior studies in which participation in a parental education program had a favorable outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Madden et al., 1976; Pfannenstiel & Seltzer, 1985), although there exists a difference in the impact of the program effects. In interpreting our findings, however, we were careful not to

make a direct cause-effect link, considering that our results are based on survey questionnaires. Although we tried to control for many possible extraneous variables in the study (the teenage status of the mother at random assignment, mother's education, mother's primary language, adult male in the household, mother's previous experience of Head Start programs, family poverty level, child's gender, child's age at random assignment, and the program status), there still exist many factors determining parental behaviors, parent-child interaction, and children's cognitive development. For example, self-selection would remain as a major confounding effect when examining the effects of parenting classes on those dependent variables. The strongly motivated mothers would naturally participate in the parenting classes; thus the motivation rather than the program effects may play a major role in increasing cognitive and language stimulation and parent-child interactions. Therefore, we are cautious about an interpretation that declares the improved outcomes of those dependent variables are due to the effect of parenting classes. Another limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data. The participation in parenting classes was a response in the parent interview. With self-reporting methods, a social desirability response bias is of particular concern. Therefore, we suggest that further study is needed to consider the effect of self-selection for parental involvement; we further suggest collecting the data by a means other than self-report.

It is also important to note that there may be many other psychosocial and contextual outcome factors that this study did not consider. Therefore, we recommend that the EHSRE collect child outcome data on pre-academic and behavioral competencies as well as other contextual variables; at the same time we suggest that future studies explore the effects of parenting classes on other psychological and social factors for mothers and children.

We also urge the EHSRE to include program factors from each local Early Head Start program, such as structure, curriculum, child-teacher ratios, parent involvement, teacher qualifications, training, and professional development. As we explained regarding its regulations, Head Start allows each local program autonomy in planning and implementing curricula, including parental involvement programs. Therefore, it is very important to consider the effects of different local programs in examining the effects of parental involvement to gain insights about important determinants for successful programs.

Despite the limitations, this study has important implications regarding potential benefits of parenting classes for both parents and children, especially those from low SES backgrounds. Therefore, this study suggests that an evaluation study of parenting classes for low-income families would be possible using an experimental design with direct causal-effect interpretation. Moreover, the practices and impacts of parenting classes for children who are preschool age

or younger have been relatively less studied than those for school-age children, although the importance of parental involvement has been emphasized more often than not. As Early Head Start staff recognizes parents as important resources for the education of children, it is important to encourage parents with young children to learn appropriate parenting skills and to help them maximize interactions with their children at home.

As Edwards, Pleasants, and Franklin (1999) have shown, young children learn not through academic activities such as paper-and-pencil tasks or rote memorization, but from parent-child interactions, including reading books, having open-ended conversations, singing songs, doing creative art projects, and pretend play. Thus, it is very important to have parents recognize the importance of play and learn to stimulate cognitive development in play scenes. Therefore, to conclude, the present study suggests that early childhood education programs should provide parenting classes for children's parents. In these classes, practical ideas about interacting with children, as well as the importance of parental roles in education, should be taught. The contents of parenting classes may include (1) the importance of positive interaction between parents and children, (2) how to play with children at home, (3) good activities for children's literacy and cognitive development, and (4) how to arrange the home environment to promote their children's development and learning. The more children gain exposure to cognitive stimulation in a preschool program and at home during early childhood, the more ready they will be for schooling later.

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Book Review

Achievement for All: A Book Review

Ward W. Weldon

Key Words: achievement gap, Latino, Black, Asian, minority students, equity, education, cultures, diversity, partnerships, families, teachers, book review

Striving Toward Equity: Improving Practice and Policy

Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Strategies for Educating Latino, Black, and Asian Students, edited by Susan J. Paik and Herbert J. Walberg (2007), deals with the importance of understanding and acknowledging diversity in our schools. Consequently, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should consider strategies that support equity and fairness in our schools for students of all races, ethnicities, cultures, income levels, and language groups. The central focus of the book discusses practices in homes, schools, and communities that promote achievement and well-being for all students.

When James Coleman published the landmark study *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966), he found that parent and community socioeconomic status or income levels are highly associated with student success in schools. In spite of our knowledge and efforts since 1966, we are still very far from achieving fairness in schooling for our students and communities. This issue is important as median incomes may vary among racial and cultural groups. While funding equity is not addressed specifically in this book, practice and policy issues regarding finance are inevitable. However, money alone is never enough to create equity. It takes intelligent and strategic use of school personnel and funds to overcome, for example, disabilities, poverty, and unfamiliarity with the language of instruction.

Narrowing the Achievement Gap discusses how the most visible minority groups, Latino, Black, and Asian students, face varying attitudes, values, and experiences in schools in the United States. In addition, there are also persistent gaps in expectations and achievement levels among Latino, Black, and even Asian students. Differences also exist among foreign-born and U.S.-born students from within these groups. The book shows that none of the three groups studied have a single, uniform, and monolithic culture, either at home or in the school. Instead, these groups are large collections of sub-cultures and, further, individual families with differing views of education and acculturation into the educational, social, and economic system.

Family-School-Community Partnerships Across Cultures

This book also asks important questions. These include: How do schools partner with families and communities to maximize student achievement? How can we strategically and effectively understand Latino, Black, and Asian students and support their educational experiences in the U.S.? What are some strategies to narrow the achievement gap for struggling students?

Editors Paik and Walberg provide an introductory overview and a concluding set of recommendations for practice and policy. There are nine chapters by various authors about aspects of the school experiences of Latino, Black, and Asian students. The book is unique in that each group is uniformly presented in three sections: (1) Culturally Diverse Families and Schooling; (2) Histories, Issues of Immigration, and Schooling Experiences; and (3) Socio-Cultural Issues on Teaching, Learning, and Development. The book provides interdisciplinary perspectives from anthropology, education, psychology, sociology, and cultural and ethnic studies.

Divergent Origins, Destinies, and Achievement

Emphasizing the theme of diversity within Latino, Black, and Asian categories of students, one of the chapters tackles the common supposition that Asians may be expected to be a high-achieving "model minority." In Chapter 10, "The Truth and Myth of the Model Minority: The Case of Hmong Americans," Stacey J. Lee challenges us to remember that not all of the national and ethnic groups within the broad categories are alike. This chapter shows that the schooling and other experiences of Hmong Americans can be starkly different from those of other Asians and other members of recent immigrant groups.

Xue Lan Rong and Frank Brown discuss differences in foreign-born and U.S.-born Blacks in Chapter 6, "Educational Attainment of Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Young Blacks." Drawn from observations and census data, they present findings on achievement, identity, and generational differences

in understanding Black immigrant groups and African American students. In the same section, Min Zhou in "Divergent Origins and Destinies: Children of Asian Immigrants" (Chapter 7) and Robert K. Ream and Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar in "The *Mobility/Social Capital Dynamic*: Understanding Mexican American Families and Students" (Chapter 5) also discuss diverse immigrant experiences and the importance of social networks.

Culture, Parenting, and Partnerships

Concha Delgado-Gaitan describes practices to encourage the development of partnerships between Latino parents and their schools in Chapter 2: "Fostering Latino Parent Involvement in the Schools: Practices and Partnerships." Delgado-Gaitan discusses the importance of parent involvement and effective partnerships as exemplified in a Mother-Daughter school project. She also points out that although Latino workers are over-represented in the lower-paid ranks of the U. S. labor force, a recent survey shows that there are also large numbers of highly paid and highly influential Latinos who may serve as supporters of school improvement and as inspirational figures for Latino youth.

Continuing on the theme of culturally diverse families, two other chapters are included to provide perspective on Asian and African American parenting. Valerie Ooka Pang's chapter (4), "Asian Pacific American Cultural Capital: Understanding Diverse Parents and Students," and Ronald D. Taylor's chapter (3), "Parenting, Social-Emotional Development, and School Achievement of African American Youngsters," inform the reader about culture, parenting, immediate environments, and student development.

Effective Classroom Practices and Strategies

Emphasizing strategic opportunities for raising the effectiveness level of schooling for African American students, Gail L. Thompson provides an insightful list of "Seven Things that African American Students Need from Their Teachers" in Chapter 9. Thompson refers to her own sixth-grade teacher, a lady named Mrs. Tessem. She advocates that teachers develop a "Mrs. Tessem mind-set" in order to be effective instructors of low-income African American children. The "Mrs. Tessem mind-set" includes eight core beliefs, for example, students must develop a "going-to-college" view of themselves. These instructional beliefs highlight the importance of having high expectations of students and helping them to develop long-term planning skills leading to high achievement in school and life. One very important factor in school success is the power of expectations that students have of themselves and that parents, peers, and teachers have for them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968/2003).

In addition, Thompson's chapter refers to school leaders as well as to classroom teachers. It is important to remember that school leaders face crucially important tasks of selecting teachers, supporting their professional development, and evaluating them. Thus, the beliefs and practices of school leaders are important determinants of success in "narrowing the achievement gap."

Hersh C. Waxman, Yolanda N. Padrón, and Andres García continue on the theme of practices and strategies in their chapter (8), "Educational Issues and Effective Practices for Hispanic Students." They address critical issues facing Hispanic students and conclude with research-based recommendations in tackling the achievement gap.

One Size (Strategy) Does Not Fit All

The noun "Strategies" in the sub-title of this book is explicitly and significantly plural. If there is any one strategy (in the singular) of the "one-size-fits-all" kind, it is that each student is different from every other student and deserves to be recognized in her or his individuality. This is easy for a book reviewer to say, but hard for teachers and other educators to do. But there is hope! In spite of wide variations within ethnicities and cultures, *Narrowing the Achievement Gap* presents specific strategies for helping Latino, Black, and Asian students to have better educational experiences and more adequate scores and school credentials. The recommended strategies are grouped into the three areas of research, policy, and practice.

In regard to research, the book calls for on-site research in schooling practices with explicit consideration of differential effects experienced by the ethnic and cultural groups studied. Secondary data (largely gathered from test scores and completion rates) can furnish good foundations for understanding the issues, but close and effective links between researchers and practitioners are recommended in the book as appropriate supports for focusing research directly on student success and for serving Latino, Black, and Asian students well.

The policy strategies in *Narrowing the Achievement Gap* emphasize communication, curriculum alignment, and funding equity and address the thorny issues of improving teacher retention and reducing the harmful effects of student mobility. Parent and community focus groups that inform proposed education legislation are recommended, as are data-based approaches to policy reviews at district, state, and national levels.

The majority of the strategies suggested are focused on educational practice. All of the recommendations for improved practice are aimed at building a more supportive environment for students, educators, families, schools, and communities. There is a call to develop community-based programs in schools and to find more (and more effective) ways to connect students to their school

community and to build student attachment to the school. Some of these examples include teaching social skills and the use of role-playing activities, studies of student knowledge and skills, and "school environment" studies of student attitudes and experiences. Further, intentional efforts to build leadership capacity among parents are recommended, as well as providing programs that teach parents how to navigate the school environment. The professional development and preservice teacher education strategies suggested emphasize cultural diversity and the awareness of how culture influences the teaching-learning process.

A general weakness in our educational system is that we continue to think about teaching primarily as a solitary activity. This is true in spite of the fact that two of the fundamental benefits of schooling are the collaborative ones of relationship-building and learning how to communicate and work effectively with others. It is my opinion that we do not do enough to overcome teacher loneliness and promote the idea that teachers can improve their practice (and survive teacher stress) by teaming with parents and fellow educators in planning and implementing instruction. There are parts of the book (especially Chapter 2) that touch on these topics, but a chapter specifically devoted to building the skills of cooperation and communication across cultures and in multi-cultural teams would have been a good addition.

Mrs. Tessem as Role Model

Final questions: Is it too much to hope that reading this book will make teachers more like Mrs. Tessem, researchers more able to identify the source of her power, and school decision-makers more likely to find and support large-scale cadres of Mrs. Tessems? What can we do to expand the influence of the Mrs. Tessems of the world through professional development and the development of teamwork among educators and with parents? *Narrowing the Achievement Gap* provides a great place to begin the discussion.

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