

Family-School Partnerships: Leadership Module for Family-School Connections

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Abstract This module is designed to provide the leadership team with essential information about critical process variables for creating and sustaining family-school connections (i.e., approach taken, attitudes held, atmosphere present, actions taken). The content focuses on family-school partnerships and emphasizes school variables that impact parent participation. Broad topics, which include policies for family-school partnerships to enhance children's learning, critical aspects of a welcoming atmosphere at school for engaging families, ensuring a school-wide effort for partnerships, and persistent efforts to reach uninvolved families, are important for children's learning and applicable specifically to enhancing children's reading skills. Although teachers are the primary contact with parents, ways to support teacher efforts to enhance reading of students living in unique situations are also important.

Keywords: Family-School Partnerships, Leadership Module, Family-School Connections

Introduction

Relationships are viewed as a means to foster resilience. According to Wang, Haertl, and Walberg (1997), "Resilience is promoted when the resources in the school, family, and community are united and dedicated to the healthy development and academic success of children" (p. 137). Users of this module are encouraged to apply the key principles of creating constructive family-school relationships specifically to enhancing students' reading success.

In the past decade, an interest in family-school relationships has increased immeasurably, due to the dramatic changes in the structure and function of families and to the consistent, cumulative findings that home environments and out-of-school time contribute to children's learning. In addition, school reform efforts focused only on teacher and school practices have not been overwhelmingly successful in improving student achievement, especially for low income and nonwhite students (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993). Note the impact of federal policies

and support of professional organizations on working with parents as partners. For example:

Because of the recognition that parents play a role in developing children's learning habits, federal policies for family involvement have been established in the National Educational Goals (National Educational Goals Panel, 1999), and further explicated in IDEA (U. S. Congress, 1999), and Title 1 (U. S. Department of Education, 1997). Most recently, Bush's "Leave No Child Behind" legislation emphasizes family-school-community partnerships.

Position statements from professional organizations, which reinforce federal policies, have been generated. For example, in April 1999 the delegate assembly of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) revised and passed a position statement on home-school collaboration. Similarly, the National PTA (1998) has developed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

The need for a new social contract

There is consensus that a new social contract between families and schools, one where students, families, peers, and teachers are placed in an altered relation to one another and to the child's education is needed. Former U. S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley seems to agree. He recently pointed out, "Parents are the essential link to improving American education, and schools have to do a better job of reaching out to them. Sending a report card home is not enough. Parents want to help their children succeed in school, and often need guidance on how to be most effective" (cited in Skoglund, 1999, p. 1).

Working with parents is often thought of as simple; after all, parents and teachers share a vested interest in children and youth. And yet, it is complex. There is common agreement for the notion that effective inclusion of parents and community with education is about: (a) supporting, teaching, and enjoying children and youth; (b) working together to promote positive outcomes for children and youth, including school completion, achievement, opportunity to learn, social functioning, and achievement; and (c) creating conditions that support children and adolescents as learners (Christenson, 1995; Epstein, 1995; Rich, 1993). An effective family-school connection is prevention-oriented and represents a 13-year contract between families and schools to provide a quality education for all students. It is essential to understand process variables (i.e., the "how") that influence family-school connections for children's learning to achieve a new social contract or "way of doing business."

The four A's: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions provide a heuristic aid to conceptualize the key elements or conditions necessary for optimal school-family relationships. As you reflect on the current status of

family-school relationships and critical issues facing families and educators in your school, consider the various indicators that impact the degree to which positive connections for children's learning between families and schools exist (or can exist).

Study Group Activity #1: Identifying Critical Issues in our School -Completing the Inventory for Creating School-Family Connections. Read the inventory, which appears in Appendix A, to identify critical areas for which a change may lead to more positive connections with families. Have teachers in the building complete the inventory to obtain a collective sense of areas to change. The inventory could be used to survey or interview a sample of parents. Use this information to focus school wide planning efforts to create school-family connections for children's reading.

Approach: The Framework for Interaction with Parents

Dialogue questions: What are the current out reach strategies for creating family-school partnerships for children's learning and reading at your school? What roles do parents typically play? How is family involvement defined across teachers?

Approach: Central to the philosophy embodied in family and school as partners is a belief in shared responsibility for educating and socializing children and youth. From a shared responsibility perspective, the product of education- -learning- -is not produced by schools, but by students with the help of parents, educators, peers, and community professionals who support learners (Seeley, 1985). Thus, students learn because of what students do, but students "do" because of a supportive safety net between home and school. Similarly, others have called for thinking of educational partnerships as *shared goals + shared*

contributions + shared accountability or a *common effort toward a shared goal*. Thus, a critical question for your schools is: Has a shared goal for enhancing children's reading success been established across home and school? Using information from the inventory (Appendix A), the leadership team plays an instrumental role in establishing a school-wide goal.

Thinking systemically

Systems-ecological theory provides the framework for organizing the reciprocal influences between home and school. It helps to think "home *and* school". . . and to avoid thinking "home *or* school." When students are having trouble reading, a systems thinker never debates whether the "cause" is at home or school or elsewhere. Rather, contributing factors not causes are most relevant. Because home and school contribute to the child's reading and learning, both contribute to the child's level of reading performance. Thus, efforts are directed to home and school with the goal of helping the whole system work better for encouraging and supporting the child's reading progress.

Based on general systems theory, specific organizational principles govern interactions over time between home and school (Christenson, Abery, & Weinberg, 1986). Six principles applied to family-school relationships include:

Circular causality. The system is a group of interrelated individuals; thus, change in one individual affects other individuals and the group as a whole. Causality is circular rather than linear because every action is also a reaction. School difficulties affect children's behavior within a family, and conversely family problems influence students' achievement and/or behavior in school.

Nonsummativity. The system as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts; the whole adds the property of relationship to the parts (synergism). Coordinating effort

among home, school, and community resources achieves a synergistic relationship, and the notion of synergism further underscores that school-family-community together can achieve more than either alone.

Equifinality. According to this principle, the same outcome may result from different antecedents. For example, families whose interactional styles are diverse may both have children who are experiencing school success. Simply stated, there is more than one path to the same goal; thus, options for family involvement and participation in children's reading are not only accepted but also expected from systems theory.

Multifinality. This principle suggests that similar initial conditions may lead to dissimilar end states; thus similar home support for reading strategies may have different effects on children's progress. Therefore, a standard, uniform prescription for parental assistance with reading may achieve the desired goal for some children and families, and not for others.

Communication. All behavior is regarded as communication---transmitting interpersonal messages. If home and school operate as two separate worlds, children can become burdened, carrying messages between two systems. For example, the role of message bearer for reading performance can place a heavy toll on children as well as the family-school relationship.

Rules. Rules within schools and families serve to organize the respective interactions and function to maintain a stable system by prescribing and limiting an individual's behavior. The rules provide expectations about roles, actions, and consequences that guide either school or family life vis-à-vis the family-school relationship. Difficulties emerge when the rules and values of home and school are not shared and discussed. Parents may

jump to conclusions about the school's disciplinary philosophy or reading program; educators may stereotype parental attitudes or behaviors. Since rules are essential to maintain the intactness of the system, a set of operating rules for the entire, overarching system of school and family is critical, especially for providing consistency of influence and ensuring generalization of interventions. Family-school partnership agreements are a helpful tool to share information and resources between home and school.

Defining the family-school relationship as essential

Pianta and Walsh (1996) described a necessary belief system for educators, one where educators understand that children develop and learn in the context of the family, and *that* system (i.e., child/family) must interface in a positive way with the school system and schooling issues for children's educational performance to be optimal. Not all educators recognize families and schools as contexts for children's learning or believe interventions should encompass the family. However, this may be considered the difference of looking at families as "essential partners" and looking at families as "desirable extras." How do educators in your school view the impact of home influences on children's reading?

Also, Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (1999) have argued that greater consideration should be given to the development of family-school relationships early and overtime because parents are very helpful in the educational process. Their work has demonstrated that the quality of the parent's relationship with the teacher and school personnel is as valid an indicator of a successful transition to schooling as the child's competence in kindergarten. In fact, the quality of this relationship predicts later school success, particularly for situations where discontinuity between the

systems is present.

Seeley (1985) called for individuals to move from the concept of relationships in terms of service delivery ---of "provider" and "client"; of "professionals" and "target" populations---to one of complementary efforts toward common goals. He argued:

Partners may help one another in general or specific ways, but none is ever a client, because the relationship is mutual. Providers and clients can deal with one another at arm's length; partners share an enterprise, though their mutuality does not imply or require equality or similarity. Participants in effective partnerships may be strikingly different, each contributing to the common enterprise, particular talents, experiences, and perspectives and sometimes having different status within the relationship and control over aspects of the work to be done" (Seeley, 1985, p. 65).

Garbarino (1982), an advocate of systems theory and systems intervention for children and youth, aptly notes that support for children's development is represented by "connections that occur whenever individuals (e.g., parents, teachers) or systems (schools, churches, families) have ongoing contact with each other that is organized around concern for the welfare of the child" (p. 125). Therefore, an approach where the significance of families for children's reading is clear, and shared, meaningful roles are established for families and educators with respect to fostering reading success is important to establish. In comprehensive programs, family involvement is an integral part of what the school does to enhance learning opportunities and educational progress for students. To create an overall partnership philosophy, many schools have benefited from the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein, the National PTA, or conceptualization of co-roles advocated by the U.S. Department of Education for urban schools (Moles,

1993a).

Epstein's structure for organizing family-school partnership activities

Noted researcher Joyce Epstein (1995) has delineated six types of family-school involvement, underscoring that families and schools can connect in many ways and that families can and do participate both at school and at home. Epstein has moved from traditional definitions for the involvement types. For example, “workshop” means making information about a topic available in a variety of forms, not merely a meeting about a topic held at the school building. Or “help” at home means encouraging, listening, reacting, monitoring and discussing schoolwork, not only “teaching” school subjects.

Sample practices for the six types are illustrated in Appendix B. Note that these types are broader than home support for reading, and illustrate many ideas for family involvement activities (i.e., the “what”). This structure is very helpful for organizing the connection between home and school for children’s reading.

Type 1, *Parenting*, refers to the school assisting families with parenting skills, helping parents understand child and adolescent development, and helping families provide home conditions that support learning.

The development of effective two-way communication about school programs and children’s progress between home and school defines Type 2, *Communicating*.

Volunteering, which is Type 3, refers to school efforts in recruiting, training, and organizing families to support students and school programs.

In Type 4, educators are encouraged to work with families to *enhance learning at home*.

Type 5, *Decision making*, refers to involving families in school and district level decision making, including decisions

for both practices and policies.

Epstein’s sixth category of involvement is *collaborating with the community* to coordinate resources and services to families, students, and schools to enhance students’ learning and school experiences.

National standards for family involvement programs

The *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* (National PTA, 1998), which were developed by education and parent involvement professionals, are an extension of Epstein’s (1995) six types of involvement. Each standard addresses these types of parent involvement:

Communicating – Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Parenting – Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Student Learning – Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Volunteering – Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

School Decision Making and Advocacy – Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect their children and families.

Collaborating – Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Accompanying each standard is a set of quality indicators that represent actions to be taken by school personnel to create positive connections for children’s learning and development. These can be obtained from the National PTA (<http://www.pta.org>). According to the National PTA (2000), “Effectively involving parents requires understanding the four key roles they play in comprehensive and inclusive parent involvement programs” (p. 3). The roles are: teachers/nurturers, communicators/advisors, supporters/learners, and collaborators/decision makers.

Co-roles for families and educators

The U.S. Department of Education (Moles, 1993a) has described five roles for families *and* school personnel: co-communicators, co-supporters, co-learners, co-teachers, and co-decision makers. Two points are particularly noteworthy about this conceptualization of school-family roles.

- First, the labels used to describe the roles (e.g., co-communicator) were deliberately selected to facilitate and encourage a shared responsibility approach for children's learning. Thus, the tone for the relationship is set by the choice of language.
- Second, this conceptualization avoids thinking about roles for parents or educators in isolation. The focus is on roles within the family-school relationship. The roles are arranged as a pyramid with co-communicators at the base, followed by co-supporters, co-learners, and co-teachers with co-decision makers at the top. Each subsequent role requires more active participation, commitment, and skill; thus, they are likely to involve fewer individuals. It is assumed that all families and educators are involved as co-communicators, and fewer are involved as co-decision makers. Clearly, there are a variety of ways for parents to be involved and different levels of commitment as to how parents want to be involved. This provides a concrete way of thinking of how all families can be involved in some way, a way that is sensitive to their needs or family circumstances.

Specific examples of the co-roles are provided in Appendix C. The co-roles are:

Family and school as *co-communicators* address the need to exchange information that enables both to assist children's learning. A variety of techniques, including written, face-to-face, telephone, formal and informal meetings, and videos are

used because a primary goal of communication is to increase shared meaning and understanding about students' performance.

Family and school as *co-supporters* address both the needs of the partners to support the child, but also the need for the partners to support each other. For example, families show support to children by providing positive encouragement for learning and to schools by attending back-to-school nights and student performances. Schools support families by being responsive to their questions and providing a welcoming climate. Teachers support families by calling at the first sign of a concern and inviting them to visit the classroom or school.

Family and school as *co-learners* provide opportunities for educators (e.g., administrators, teachers, support personnel) and families to learn about each other and how to work together to support student learning. For example, families want information about school procedures, policies and practices, whereas school staff needs opportunities to increase their effectiveness in communicating with parents.

Family and school as *co-teachers* recognize the formal teaching of students in school settings and the ways families support and encourage learning at home and in the community. By working together, teachers and families can create connections and provide mutual support for each other in ways that enhance student learning.

Finally, home and school as *co-decision makers, advocates, and advisors* focus on participation in formal organizations and committees, such as the Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) board, school site council or Principal Advisory Committee.

Why adopt a school wide shared responsibility approach?

We know schools with programs that improve student performance are comprehensive, well planned, and provide options for family involvement, which allows schools to be responsive to family diversity (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Consider some of the following findings:

Many studies have demonstrated a ceiling effect with respect to achievement gains for low-income students, particularly in urban education settings. That is, students' achievement scores have been raised; however, their overall performance is still below the national average (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Studies that correlate levels of parent involvement with gains in student achievement invariably find that the more extensive the involvement, the higher the student achievement. In programs that are designed to be full partnerships, where the programs are comprehensive and address attitudes, philosophy, structure, and day to day practices, student achievement not only improves, it reaches levels that are standard for middle-class children (Comer, 1995; Comer & Haynes, 1991).

Children who are the farthest behind make the greatest gains (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Programs and practices are stronger in schools where teachers perceive that they, their colleagues, and parents all feel strongly about the importance of parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

Parents are the individuals who know what happens for their children across school years; teachers usually only have children for one year. Parents can experience discontinuity with respect to what teachers expect unless there is common agreement about the importance of family involvement in reading and learning. It has been consistently suggested that a viable strategy for good family-school relationships is to set shared goals and to establish a strong family-school

relationship in kindergarten that is fostered in subsequent years (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Regardless of educational level, ethnic background, or income level, parents want their children to be successful in school; however, they do not know how to assist their children. Parents report they would be willing to spend more time on activities with children if educators gave them more guidance (Epstein, 1986).

Epstein (1995, personal communication) speculates that only a relatively small percentage of parents, approximately 10%, have personal problems so severe that they cannot work as partners with schools, given the proper assistance. She contends that parent educational level and family social class are influential factors for which families become involved in education only if school personnel don't work to involve all parents.

Study Group Activity #2: Setting a Tone for Shared Responsibility. There are three options and/or sets of material that can be used to complete this activity. Select one. The purpose of this activity is to set in motion attitudes and actions that expect parental engagement in children's reading, but provide options for involvement and opportunities to share information and resources. These activities will help you to design options for family involvement at your school.

Participants are encouraged to review the three sets of materials and to choose which one best fits their school context. Note that these activities are based on work that underscores the importance of family-school teams for providing the leadership for family-school programs (see actions).

- Review sample practices for the six types of family-school partnership activities described by Epstein, which are provided in Appendix B. Create a list of sample practices related specifically to

reading that are categorized according to the six types. This material may be very helpful for sharing information among teachers, explaining a shared responsibility approach to parents, and creating a family-school policy about family involvement in children's reading and learning (see actions).

- Obtain the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement on the National PTA website: <http://www.pta.org>. Read the specific indicators for the types. Note that the indicators are formatted as a survey using a scale from "consistently evident" to "not evident" at our school. Discuss the merits and limitations of using these indicators as an opportunity to attain a picture of your school's perspective on family-school relationships. Will this survey allow you to develop a coordinated approach among teachers? A philosophy for the school that is paired with actions? A norm for a partnership orientation? If so, implement the survey and share results with the staff.

- Specific examples of five roles for families *and* school personnel: co-communicators, co-supporters, co-learners, co-teachers, and co-decision makers are provided in Appendix C. Use this structure to develop co-roles for parents and teachers that are specific to the goal of enhancing children's reading success. This material would be extremely helpful should your school decide to establish partnership agreements (i.e., parent-teacher-student contracts) for clarifying roles and responsibilities for supporting and encouraging developing readers.

Summary: Family-school collaboration is an attitude, not merely an activity. The intersection of family and school is considered vital for children's performance in reading and learning, and *the* emphasis is placed on the quality of the relationship rather than only roles (i.e.,

activities) to be executed by home or school. The goal of constructive family-school relationships is to change the interface between home and school to support students as readers and learners, not merely to arrive at a solution for the immediate school-based concern (Weiss & Edwards, 1992). The view that parents are essential for children's reading and learning progress is certainly an implicit assumption of collaborative family-school relationships. A missing piece is the explicit acknowledgment, particularly in school attitudes and actions that parents are essential partners. Adopting an approach that recognizes the *significance of families* and the *contributions of schools* for children's reading and engagement with school and learning provides a necessary framework for constructive family-school connections.

Attitudes: The Values and Perceptions Held about Family-School Relationships

Dialogue questions: What are the barriers for establishing effective family-school relationships to enhance children's reading and learning? Which families are systematically excluded from your school's current outreach activities to parents?

Attitudes: Along with attitudes that foster the formation of healthy home-school relations, there are a number of attitudes that may produce barriers to the establishment of effective relationships. Parents or educators can hold these attitudes. As you consider the following, can you think of a specific incident in your school experience?

- Partial resistance toward increasing home/school cooperation.
- Assumptions made about others that are based on specific labels or structural characteristics.
- Stereotypic views of people, events, conditions, or actions that are not

descriptive of behavior, but portray a causal orientation.

- Assumption that parents and teachers must hold identical values and expectations.
- Failure to view differences as strengths.
- Limiting impressions of child to observations in only one environment.
- Lack of belief in a partnership orientation to enhance student learning/development.
- A blaming and labeling attitude that permeates the home-school atmosphere.
- A win-lose rather than a win-win attitude in the presence of conflict.
- Tendencies to personalize anger-provoking behaviors by the other individual.
- Lack of perspective taking or empathizing with the other person.
- Failure to recognize the importance of preserving the family-school relationship.

When working with parents, the emergence of challenging situations is inevitable. Many times school personnel are heard describing families as “hard to reach” or as “problem parents.” Characterizing families in this way places blame on individuals. Rather, it is necessary to recognize the difficulties inherent in *situations* by focusing on contextual circumstances that can be altered (e.g., “this is a challenging situation”), and not on individuals with unalterable characteristics (e.g., “this is a resistant parent”). A constructive tactic may be to frame challenges in terms of an unsatisfactory, unproductive interface between home and school. As such, this presents a problematic situation that requires the collective attention and efforts of parents and school personnel to correct.

Understanding and addressing barriers

Effective family-school relationships work to systematically remove barriers between families and educators. There is an

ongoing process to identify and recommend constructive suggestions for improvement in the family-school interface rather than assigning blame. There are many ways to categorize barriers, which extend far beyond the typical logistical concerns, albeit important, of transportation and daycare. For example, the categorization of barriers by Lontos (1992)- - -barriers for educators, barriers for parents, and barriers for family-school relationships- - - is particularly helpful because it suggests that barriers are expected for all and the emphasis must be on understanding and removing barriers. Conceptualizing barriers for each system as well as the relationship may serve to promote perspective taking and enhance the understanding of constraints involved for all individuals.

Consider these barriers for school personnel, parents, and the partnership. Are they evident in your school? What suggestions might you and others have for removing the barriers?

Barriers for school personnel:

- Ambiguous commitment to parent involvement.
- Use of negative communication about students’ school performance and productivity.
- Use of stereotypes about families, such as dwelling on family problems as an explanation for students’ performance.
- Doubts about the abilities of families to address schooling concerns.
- Lack of time and funding for family outreach programs.
- Fear of conflict with families.

Barriers for parents:

- Feelings of inadequacy.
- Adopting a passive role by leaving education to schools.
- Linguistic and cultural differences.

- Lack of role models, information, and knowledge about resources.
- Suspicion about treatment from educators.
- Economic, emotional, and time constraints.

Barriers for the partnership:

- Limited time for communication and meaningful interaction.
- Communication primarily during crises.
- Differences in parent-educator perspectives about child's performance and behavior. paired with little or no opportunity for discussion.
- Limited contact for building trust within the family-school relationship.

Another way to think about barriers is in terms of *attitudes and interactions*. Moles (1993b) focused on attitudinal barriers such as psychological and cultural differences, and interactional barriers such as the low rate of contact, limited skills and knowledge on which to build collaboration, and restricted opportunities for meaningful dialogue. Similarly, Weiss and Edwards (1992) identified three comprehensive, key barriers:

- Limited conception by school personnel of the roles families can play,
- Psychological and cultural differences that lead to assumptions that build walls between families and educators, and
- The lack of a routine communication system, particularly to prevent misunderstandings between families and educators.

Two other important barriers/challenges

Although these descriptions of barriers seem comprehensive, it is critical to think of two others. The first is represented by the failure of educators to examine systematically school practices that "fail" families. For example, responding only in a crisis, defining (and labeling) the family solely by structure (e.g., "what can

we expect; after all, this is a single parent"), and viewing the family as deficient are far too common examples of school practices that result in an uncomfortable atmosphere for discussion and interaction between families and school personnel. As a result, there is too little outreach to families and children about whom school personnel are most concerned.

Attitudes that characterize differences as deficits are often conveyed in schools. Schools in America generally typify a culture characteristic of a middle-class, educationally-oriented, Euro-American lifestyle. Further, schools tend to perpetuate the values, norms, and practices of individuals who "fit into" this culture. Families who differ are often seen as "deficient" (Davies, 1993). In many cases, there is an overemphasis on labels. Common labels often surround "what" parents and families are (such as uneducated or poor) or what they are failing to do (no follow through on teacher requests) as defined by the school's agenda. A focus on status variables (e.g., educational level, income, family structure) rather than individuals and actions often leads quickly to stereotypes and preconceived judgments.

Concomitantly, there is a lack of attention to personal characteristics of a parent or family ("who" they are) and what they do to support their children. In fact, parents who experience diverse ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds *are* involved in the lives of their children, regardless of whether or not they are formally involved in their school life (Bempechat, 1998; Edwards, Fear, & Gallego, 1995). Further, many families are involved in the education of their children, albeit in ways that school personnel may not consider because they see no concrete outcome or product (Wright & Smith, 1998).

We fail as educators when we form conclusions based on what we believe families need. This is heightened when we fail to consider how families may be supporting their children's education already. For example, educators may believe that families need help supporting their children's homework, when they may not need that form of assistance at all. Rather, other forms of assistance, such as how to best communicate with teachers or understand school policies or practices, may be necessary. In such scenarios, it is the schools, not the families, who fail students.

The second barrier is the infrequent use of practices that focus on family *and* schools as contexts for children's reading and learning (i.e., thinking systemically). Integral to advancing outcomes for children and youth are school-based actions that include families and account for how the family-school interface – what we do together – the synergism – affects reading outcomes for students.

Attitudes influence practices

Attitudes espoused by educators (e.g., teachers, school psychologists, principals) often translate into the manner in which relationships with families are developed. Several models for interacting with families are prominent in the literature, each conveying a consistent pattern of attitudes, assumptions, and goals that structure parent-educator relationships. When these patterns occur over time, they begin to take on a history of their own (Power & Bartholomew, 1987). Developing an understanding of the alternative models is useful for understanding parent-educator relationships at a school. Swap (1993) states, "Realizing that there are different approaches to parent involvement can stimulate debate among the faculty about the most appropriate goals and assumptions for a parent involvement

program and help avoid the random, scatter-shot programming for parents that is so characteristic of many schools" (p. 28).

Swap (1993) has described four different models for parent involvement: Protective, school-to-home transmission, curriculum enrichment, and partnership model. Each serves a different purpose and has inherent advantages and disadvantages. Which model best characterizes your school? Is this the model desired by staff and parents?

The *protective model* has as its goals the protection of the school from parental interference. The model is based on the assumptions that parents delegate to schools the responsibility of, and hold schools responsible for, educating their children; and that educators accept this responsibility. The primary attitude prevalent in this model holds that schools should work independent of families to educate children -- parental involvement in decision-making or collaborative endeavors are inappropriate or unnecessary. Thus, the potential for home-school collaboration is restricted in this model, and opportunities for sharing resources and responsibilities are extinguished.

The *school-to-home transmission model* attempts to enlist parents in supporting the school's mission as its primary goal. This model assumes that children's achievement is fostered by continuity of expectations and values across home and school. Attitudes conveyed suggest that school personnel should identify appropriate values and practices that contribute to success, and parents should reinforce the school's values and expectations. Although this model endorses the importance of the continuous interactions between home and school, it continues to be unidirectional in its influence. Parents have less input than in other models.

The *curriculum enrichment model* recognizes the expertise that families possess, and is based on the assumption that interactions between families and school personnel can enhance curricular and educational objectives. One main attitude of this model portends that parents and educators each hold unique expertise related to curriculum and instruction. An essential element of this model's success appears to be the degree to which educators can draw on parents' knowledge and experiences to inform instruction, rather than simply transferring school practices into home contexts. Potential problems arise when teachers see the curriculum as the centerpiece of their professional expertise (an attitude related to differences in roles), perhaps not willing to invite parents to help in curricular decisions or to think broadly about how school and home resources can be bridged in efforts to enhance curricular objectives. The *partnership model* to working with families endorses as its goal the desire for families and schools "to work together to accomplish a common mission... for all children in school to achieve success" (Swap, 1993; pp. 48-49). Success at accomplishing this mission requires an attitude that collaboration among parents, educators, and community members is essential. An emphasis on two-way communication, parental strengths, and mutual problem solving with parents are important aspects of this model. Furthermore, given the challenge associated with its broad and comprehensive mission, school environments must undergo a "re-visioning" that explores new policies, practices, relationships, and attitudes. Development and implementation of a partnership model for home-school relationships requires, according to Swap, the presence of four essential elements. First, it is essential that two-way

communication processes be established. According to the National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (1998), regular and meaningful communication is foundational for other standards to develop. Educators may share with family members information about school programs, curriculum, and student progress. Parents can convey to school personnel information about their child's background, strengths, and characteristics. To the greatest extent possible, both parties share their thoughts and ideas about expectations, goals, and responsibilities- ideally with respect to reading.

A second element of the partnership model is the recognition that learning is enhanced at home and at school. Development occurs across settings, and various opportunities and practices pertinent to each setting are seen as integral to supporting the child in relevant ways. For example, parents can provide structure, guidance, discipline, and assistance for their children to prepare them to take advantage of learning opportunities (Scott-Jones, 1995). Likewise, teachers develop curricula, activities, and relationships with children that create optimal conditions for learning. Unique, respective, complementary roles and practices across home and school settings, that are inherent in a partnership model, maximize reading and learning.

Third, mutual support across home and school is an important element of partnerships. Parents can support educators in many ways, including activities such as fund-raising, volunteering, reading to their child, monitoring homework, or talking with their child about their school day. Teachers can support family members by keeping parents apprised of activities, functions, student responsibilities, and school progress. Such supportive

gestures across parents and teachers can be instrumental in the establishment of trust. Mutual support also suggests the ability of parents and school personnel to identify common ground on which they share priorities and concerns, and to design a plan to begin addressing these together. This is related to the fourth element of partnership models, in which parents and educators make joint decisions at various levels. For example, decisions about an individual child's educational program may be shared, or school wide decisions concerning scheduling or other systemic issues may be the focus of partnership activities. The elements of partnerships described above reinforce the notion of "co-roles" (Moles, 1993a) introduced in approach.

To be true partners, school and family interactions must embrace collaboration as a central mode of operating. Effective collaboration is dependent on the belief that the home-school relationship is a priority. A willingness to make the relationship a priority (as reflected in such actions as creating two-way communication, increasing learning opportunities for children, providing mutual support, and engaging in joint decision-making) is a prerequisite for collaboration to occur. Various characteristics of collaboration and benefits of a collaborative approach to home-school relations are listed in Appendix D.

In collaborative relationships, there is shared ownership for identifying and working toward solutions and goals. Likewise, there is recognition of and respect for individual and cultural differences in developing and adapting to changes that come out of mutual and shared decision making. Collaboration involves both *equality* – the willingness to listen to, respect, and learn from one another, and *parity* – the blending of

knowledge, skills, and ideas to enhance the relationship, and outcomes for children.

Why a collaborative model?

One tenet of successful home-school programs is that children's educational success requires congruence between what is expected and taught at school and the expectations and values expressed at home (Fruchter, Gullotta, & White, 1992). And yet, "attempts to align schools more closely with the cultures of their students and families are still relatively rare in American education" (Fruchter et al., 1992, p. 26). The partnership orientation, in part, has been advanced to address issues of discontinuity between home and school. It also has demonstrated greater success in involving families who may be disenfranchised from schooling issues.

The School Development Program (SDP), developed by James Comer in 1968 and first implemented in King and Baldwin Elementary Schools in the New Haven School District, has three guiding principles: Collaboration, consensus, and no-fault interactions (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). Now implemented in over 600 schools, the Comer process has reported:

- School-level aggregated data that demonstrate significant average 4-year gains, greater percentage of students achieving instructional objectives, and better performance on standardized achievement tests for elementary students, exceeding gains reported for the district as a whole.
- Significant differences in academic achievement between randomly selected students in SDP schools and students in non-SDP control schools.
- Experimental control studies in which SDP students experienced significantly greater positive changes in attendance, teacher ratings of classroom behavior, attitude toward authority, and group participation and reported

significantly better perceived school competence and self-competence when compared to non-SDP students.

- Significant differences between SDP and non-SDP elementary students on six self-concept dimensions as well as significantly higher self-concept for SDP students than the national normative group.

- A quasi-experimental study in which SDP schools noted significant improvement in school climate as rated by students and parents.

Epstein's (2001) research in the past 15 years has produced helpful information on strengthening school-family-community partnerships. She has found that these partnerships grow stronger with increased levels of commitment. In a handout developed from her project, she asks: "Can you "C" the connections?"

1. Care: We care about the children and each other at this school. Families feel welcome at the school. Educators feel welcome in the community.

2. Civility/Courtesy: We respect each other at this school and recognize our shared responsibilities for children. Teachers and families talk with and listen to each other.

3. Clarity: We conduct clear and useful two-way communications about school programs; children's progress, talents and needs; community activities; and other topics important to families, students, the school, and community.

4. Cooperation: We assist each other and the students. We work together to improve the school, strengthen families, and ensure student success. We try to solve problems, and we are open to new ideas. Families, educators, and community members are comfortable working with each other.

5. Collaboration: We have a comprehensive program of school-family-community partnerships.

We use an Action Team approach that enables educators, parents, students, and community members to work together over time to design, implement, and improve the six major types of involvement with all families and at all grade levels. We work as partners to help students reach important goals. We encourage discussion and debate on important issues. We celebrate progress and continually plan improvements."

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into parents', pupils' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement and their relation with outcomes on child level. Two research questions were examined: (1) How strong is the interrelationship between parent ratings, teacher ratings and pupil ratings of parental involvement?; (2) What is the effect of parent, teacher and pupil ratings of parental involvement on the learning achievement/wellbeing of pupils?

Before focussing specifically on the first research question, descriptive statistics showed that parental involvement is generally perceived as high by parents, pupils as well as teachers. This finding is particularly valid for dimensions concerning the involvement at home. With respect to the interrelations between the dimensions of parental involvement, these were found to be much higher for the teachers than for the parents. The pupil data showed the lowest interrelations between the various aspects of parent involvement. In other words, teachers perceive involvement as a general construct, while children differentiate mostly between the various dimensions of involvement. Based on the consistently high teacher correlations between 'performance orientation, 'cognitive stimulating home environment', 'parent-child communication' and 'structuring home climate', it can be

supposed that teachers have only little knowledge of what happens in the child's home environment and therefore consider different aspects of involvement at home as one dimension. This finding is in line with Bakker et al.'s (2007) conclusion and an earlier study exploring the factor structure of parental involvement from multiple perspective (...). This study showed that teachers consider parental involvement as a limited one-factor construct. Notwithstanding the general approach by teachers, this study distinguishes six equal factors for all actors in order to be able to compare them.

The paired correlation results show parents' and children's reports of parental involvement in the child's schooling generally to converge. Only for the dimension 'parent-teacher communication', there has been found a somewhat larger discrepancy between parent and pupil ratings. In contrast with the other constructs, the involvement activities belonging to this dimension are less visible for pupils. Consequently, it can be concluded that children are hardly abreast of the subjects of communication between their parents and teacher. Because of the large agreement between both actors' ratings, it can be supposed that their perceptions are a reliable reflection of the real degree and nature of parental involvement. On the contrary, teacher ratings diverge strongly from parent ratings. This is particularly true for the dimensions concerning home involvement, invisible for teachers. Moreover, it has been pointed out that teachers judge low educated and non-native parents and parents from non-traditional families more negatively than parents with a higher economic socio-economical status. Certainly in regard to the different aspects of involvement at home, they perceive these parents as significantly less involved than the parents themselves do. Possibly,

teachers extrapolate the lower degree of involvement within the school – as non-native parents and parents in recomposed families themselves indicated – to all dimensions of involvement. In other words, as Bakker et al. (2007) suggested, teachers tend to have a rather stereotyped image of lower SES parents. Moreover, teacher perception of parents' involvement is not only influenced by demographic variables, but also seemed to be effectuated by child characteristics. From the parent and pupil data, it can be derived that the parent's involvement depends on the child's needs. For example, parents of children feeling bad at school are perceived to communicate more frequent with the teacher, probably as a consequence of the low wellbeing. Parents of bad behaving children may impose stricter rules at home as a reaction to the bad behaviour of the child at school. However, teachers report a lower degree of setting rules by these parents.

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