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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, Sixth Edition*.

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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.

Subscription to *The School Community Journal*

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Editorial Review Board

Editor's Comments

I really enjoyed this Fall/Winter 2009 issue and believe it will be beneficial to you, our diverse readers. The first article, by Marilyn Price-Mitchell, looks at opportunities to build the relationships that make partnerships effective. It is excellent reading for anyone who wants to build systemic change that will maximize student learning. Later in the issue, Margaret Ferrara will examine the myriad of perceptions in one district as they seek to promote such change. Sharon Brooks looks in depth at one school leader and the way she fostered relationships with parents and other entities, including law enforcement and the media, to rebuild a school and the surrounding neighborhood. Kay Keiser and Laura Schulte take a look at the ethical climate of two elementary schools with the goal of fostering positive interactions and relationships, whether the setting is urban or suburban.

Jianzhong Xu also compares settings, looking at aspects of homework management among U.S. rural and urban eighth graders. Also examining homework are Vicky Tam and Raymond Chan, however, their article focuses on parents' involvement with children's homework in Hong Kong. Another article from Hong Kong, this one from Esther Sui-chu Ho, compares different leadership contexts and their effects on parental involvement in education. Finally, we have a book review by Jean Konzal that will be of interest to anyone desiring to create community within a classroom of young children.

It was a joy to accept several authors who have published with the *School Community Journal* previously, as well as to welcome several writers who were new to us. A special thank you goes out to all our editorial review board members, whose volunteer work makes our blind peer review process possible and helps us produce a quality publication. Thank you!

Lori Thomas
October 2009

Boundary Dynamics: Implications for Building Parent-School Partnerships

Marilyn Price-Mitchell

Abstract

This article draws on systems theory, complexity theory, and the organizational sciences to engage boundary dynamics in the creation of parent-school partnerships. These partnerships help children succeed through an emergent process of dialogue and relationship building in the peripheral spaces where parents and schools interact on behalf of children. Historically, parental involvement and parent education programs evolved from mechanistic thinking. This review and interpretation of multidisciplinary research suggests reframing parent-school partnerships in the context of schools as learning communities that generate new knowledge and innovation as the experiences and competencies of teachers and parents interact to make tacit knowledge explicit. Knowledge society concepts including social capital, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, and communities of practice are applied to parent-school partnerships. Acknowledging vast contributions of research to current understanding of parental involvement, the article also explores the limitations of existing theoretical models and seeks to expand that understanding through the introduction of boundary dynamics and systems thinking.

Key Words: parental involvement, school reform, systems theory, communities of practice, tacit knowledge, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, social capital, families, parents, schools, learning, education, boundary dynamics, partnerships

Introduction

On the surface, parental involvement in children's schools seems uncontroversial. Most agree that parents play an important role in their children's education and are indeed the first educators of children. Parental involvement is clearly linked to children's academic, social, and emotional development, and building parent-school partnerships is one strategy for improving student success worldwide (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 1999; Gonzalez, 2004; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Schleicher, 1992). Yet despite extensive research, family involvement experts also agree that parent-school partnerships have not received the research attention they deserve and suggest the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework to guide partnership development (Caspe, 2008; Ferguson, Ramos, Rudo, & Wood, 2008).

This article proposes that boundary dynamics, derived from recent scientific approaches to understanding complexity, can expand existing theory and knowledge about parental involvement and parent-school partnerships, providing a broader theoretical bridge to understanding the innovation and learning possible at the boundaries and peripheries between parents, schools, and communities. After a review of current and historical paradigms of parent-school relationships and their limitations, the article suggests a shift in thinking to reflect more closely the knowledge used to build learning communities and create innovation in today's complex global environments. Parental involvement literature is combined with research from the fields of complexity theory, systems theory, and organizational science to explore the challenges and opportunities that parents and schools face as they seek to improve achievement for all children.

Parent-school partnerships are extraordinarily complex. Considering the millions of individual parent and educator minds that continually assimilate values, develop worldviews, engage in communication, and interpret behavior, it is difficult to define parental involvement and parent-school partnership in a single policy or regulation. The U.S. No Child Left Behind Act mandated that schools increase parental involvement to help improve academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Yet consensus on how best to accomplish this goal amidst the even greater challenge of higher academic standards imposed on schools remains elusive. Many principals and teachers stress the importance of parental involvement while negating or negatively judging its impact (Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007), and educators experience many barriers in communicating across boundaries with families (Dodd & Konzal, 1999, 2002; Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Systems thinking focuses on parent-school partnerships through perceived boundaries to explore where and how learning occurs at the edges of interaction between people in different systems. These boundary dynamics (MacGillivray, 2006, 2008) are crucial to school reform and understanding the relationships of those committed to educating future generations. Critical review of literature on tacit knowledge, social capital, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, and communities of practice contributes to an understanding of how parent-school-community partnerships are fostered, and illustrates a proposed new direction for research and practice in the field.

Historical Link to Current Paradigm

Current views of parental involvement in U.S. education are inextricably linked to the history and early objectives of public education. In 1930, professionals who attended the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection proposed that parent education would help teach parents the norms of society, proper ways to raise children, and an understanding of social issues (Berger, 1991). During this same timeframe, the public school structure was founded with mechanistic ideals envisioning its functioning as a closed, self-sufficient system. Responsibilities within the system were fragmented between principals, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other professionals, each performing specialized tasks. Parent education was seen as a subspecialty and a necessary way of helping immigrant and indigent families assimilate into middle-class society, adopting the values and attitudes of the prevailing culture (Gordon, 1977). Schools were the identified vehicle to centralize this task.

Racism hindered the assimilation of African Americans and diverse others into the culture. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, parental involvement again comprised an important part of helping ethnic minorities adopt the values of the dominant race. Head Start, a program developed during this time to provide services to low-income children, included the insights of parents in its governance and policy structure. The participation of minority and low-income parents helped educators recognize the importance of cultural and class diversity as an asset rather than a disadvantage (Berger, 1991).

The 1970s saw a strengthening of federal support programs for parents and an emphasis on the connection between home and school on the premise that the interconnections between systems are as important for child development as the activities within them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ira Gordon emphasized three important ideas, that "the home is important and basic for human development; parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development; and the early years of life are important for lifelong

development" (1977, p. 72). Insisting that teachers must learn from parents as well as parents from teachers, Gordon pointed out that educators needed to develop new attitudes toward parents, including "new skills in communication and group processes and sharing" (p. 77). While an emphasis on mutual teacher-parent learning was a shift in thinking about the relationship between parents and schools, that shift was not operationalized into schools' structure.

The past 30 years produced extensive research on parental involvement (Davies, 1987; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Ferguson et al., 2008; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), much of it evolving as a means to improve the outcomes of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments (Smit, Driessen, Sleegers, & Teelken, 2008) and focusing on programmatic rather than systemic interventions. During this period, the use and operational definitions of the term *parental involvement* varied, including:

- the degree of communication parents have with teachers and the school about their children (Epstein, 1991; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999);
- parent-child interaction around homework (Clark, 1993; Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000);
- aspirations parents hold and communicate for their children's academic achievement (Bloom, 1980; Lopez, 2001);
- parents participation in school activities (Mapp, 1999; Stevenson & Baker, 1987);
- parental rules imposed in the home that affect education (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986); and
- developing a supportive home environment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Xu, 2001).

While research has contributed greatly to understanding parental involvement, the wide array of definitions and contexts studied and the lack of applicable theory complicate association of various forms of involvement with academic achievement and replication of programs from one school to another.

The most widely used theoretical model for studying parent-school partnerships is Epstein's classification of six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1987, 1990, 1995). Epstein's framework, built on social networking theory, emphasized a set of *overlapping spheres of influence* in which parents, teachers, and others have the potential to influence student learning and development. Epstein's model, adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association, encouraged a great deal of research, discussion, and debate in the field of family involvement. The model acknowledges many influences on children's learning, but is primarily unidirectional, exploring the

explicit ways in which families help children learn and develop. But the model does not consider the multidimensional or tacit aspects of learning between parents, educators, students, and community. Some studies supported the link between Epstein's classifications of involvement and academic benefits to students (e.g., Henderson, 1987). Others found no association between academic success and the six variables (e.g., Catsambis, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). Numerous schools of thought operate in the field of family involvement, including those that focus on the psychological processes of parental intrinsic motivation and role identity (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Thus, while perspectives differ, a great deal of foundational research confirms the importance of many types and contexts of parental involvement.

In recent years, the language has changed, from *parental involvement* and *participation* to *parent-school partnerships*, which implies the shared and equally valued roles in education described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Gordon (1977). Another term gaining wide usage is *parent engagement*, emphasizing the importance of parent's active power-sharing role as citizens of the education community rather than people who participate only when invited. However, the shift in language has yet to change the fragmented focus of the research, and many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement. One of the main barriers to partnership may be schools' mechanistic worldview, which separates educators and parents rather than integrally connecting them. Educators see themselves as experts rather than equals, creating a hierarchical relationship with parents (Lasky, 2001; Smit et al., 2008). Misconceptions and mistrust between parents and schools also make partnership difficult (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker, Denessen, & Brus-Laven, 2007; Frame, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007).

Internationally, the term *partnership* increasingly emphasizes a broad range of meaningful and cooperative relationships between parents and schools that improve students' learning, motivation, and development (Davies & Johnson, 1996). Epstein (1995) identified steps important in developing collaborative relationships between parents and schools, including an action team of teachers, parents, and school board members to oversee parental involvement efforts, financial support, and explicit goals. Dodd and Konzal (2002) expanded the definition of participation via a multi-functional view of parents and educators as a community of learners. Yet, these steps must be augmented by acceptance of a shared worldview toward partnership, which perceives the school as an open system that engages in learning at the boundaries between family, school, and community. Without equitable relationships, partnership success is unlikely. Mandates may be needed to overcome natural organizational resistance

to change, yet mandates alone will not create new conditions where partnership can thrive.

As noted above, the recent emphasis on *partnership* evolved from mechanistic and linear thinking. This reductionistic lens created boundaries between functions of learning, dissecting problems, and analyzing information to predict and manage outcomes. This reductionist way of thinking also emphasizes rigorous standards and positivist methodology, forcing many parental involvement programs, structures, and processes to be validated prior to adoption or funding. This approach leaves little room for individual, family, and community values and beliefs or differences in context between school settings. Traditional scientific tools, while extremely valuable in understanding aspects of parent, school, and community relationships, most often examine parts instead of the whole. Thus, danger lurks in elevating positivist metrics to shape broad thinking about parental involvement or limiting the vision of what is possible. Peter Senge eloquently captured this idea:

> If I had one wish for all our institutions, and the institution called school in particular, it is that we dedicate ourselves to allowing them to be what they would naturally become, which is human communities, not machines. Living beings who continually ask the questions: Why am I here? What is going on in my world? How might I and we best contribute? (2000, p. 58)

Reframing Parent-School Relationships

A systems approach to the study of parental involvement requires reorientation from the historic view of linear, cause-and-effect relationships toward a more holistic understanding of partnerships. New perspectives must be sought that more broadly address how parents, schools, and communities will work together to face the challenges and complexities of education in the 21st century. Not only do parents and educators influence a child's learning, they also hold the keys to understanding and potentially solving many of today's social issues that hinder learning and motivation. The theory of living systems – developed in the fields of biology, Gestalt psychology, ecology, general systems theory, and cybernetics – engages parents, schools, students, and communities as an integrated whole rather than as mere parts of the process of children's learning. Systems thinking embraces a view of the world through relationships, connectedness, and context rather than quantitative measurements. Through this reframing, the term *partnership* is more than rhetoric; it becomes "a key characteristic of life" (Capra, 1994, p. 8) in school communities.

The concept of partnership and its natural processes as understood by systems theorists (e.g., Bateson, 1972; Capra, 1996; Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 1992) is widely supported in the literature on education and school reform (Banathy, 1992, 1993; Banathy & Jenlink, 1996; Capra, 1999; Senge, 2000). Thus, rather than focusing on parts of systems or spheres of influence, partnership emphasizes improvement of the entire system. Clearly, parental involvement in education integrally supports children's learning and success. Each school's own social system must be explored through the lens of its own relationships. Parental involvement as a *project* often fails. But when integrated within the relationships of the school, over time, parental involvement becomes more powerful (Comer & Haynes, 1991). These integrated relationships have the potential to generate learning for children and for adults seeking to address and solve the complex issues of our times.

Complexity theory has evolved from systems thinking over the past several decades and has been successfully applied to understanding organizations (Klein, 2004; Lissack & Letiche, 2002). *Emergence*, one of complexity theory's key elements, describes the unpredictable learning and innovation that develop as the result of human interconnections within and between systems. This learning results from unexplained collaborative processes inherent in groups of individuals working together. Boundary dynamics are critical to emergence, including growing evidence of diffused boundaries between the educational tasks of schools and the parental tasks of families (Smit et al., 2008). This indicates a greater potential for collaboration and innovation as the intersections of these systems soften and overlap. This type of thinking supports aspects of Epstein's (1987, 1990, 1995) framework of overlapping spheres of influence, and provides a broader theoretical bridge to expand the thinking on parent-school-community partnerships. Instead of fragmented areas or ways that parents help children learn, emphasis focuses on the relationships that transform adult learning into action that benefits outcomes for children.

Learning and Leadership

Reframing the parent-school relationship actualizes two powerful insights from systems thinking: a new understanding of learning and leadership. The focus on learning involves everyone in the system: parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community. Principals view their schools as systems that interact with and constantly adapt to their environment, working as *boundary spanners* to facilitate collaboration and learning between systems (Bradshaw, 1999). Like biological systems, each school resides within other systems in overlapping, shared environments. Environments and boundaries between

environments cannot be viewed by linear variables, but the blueprint for these interactions can be altered in ways that produce positive change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); "The principles of ecology can also be interpreted as principles of community" (p. 8). Exploration of the social ecology of schools and how its principles apply to building parent-school partnerships can help leaders take positive action on behalf of children.

Educational values, policy, and strategy are traditionally transmitted from above and carried out by teachers and school administrators. However, reform must begin from below, where people are involved in making the daily decisions that determine their future (Brecher, Costello, & Smith, 2000). The relationship between parents and schools occurs in local school communities, not in the policy halls of Congress. The local school can drive this type of reform – a process of experimental behavior, thought, and dialogue between parents, schools, and communities. Leaders in the field of family involvement agree that the relationships between parents and schools cannot be constructed from the top down, but must involve a bottom-up component of grassroots leadership (Caspe, 2008). This bottom-up action is vital to systems change, transformation that occurs in the "nooks and crannies in and around the dominant institutions" (Brecher et al., 2000, p. 24). Systems theorists (Ashby, 1956; Bertalanffy, 1956; Buckley, 1968) first framed the idea that these nooks, crannies, boundaries, and peripheries between organizations and their environments were fertile for the creation of new knowledge. These boundary dynamics are intimately linked to education reform.

A Boundary Perspective on Parent-School Partnerships

Parental involvement in education currently emphasizes understanding various spheres, or areas, where parents influence student learning and development. Another focus is communicating explicit knowledge that researchers and schools believe is important for positive family involvement in education. This lens, historically linked to mechanistic notions that parents need guidance toward prevailing beliefs and practices, is helpful in transferring knowledge. However, it is limited in its effectiveness to understand and develop partnerships that create new knowledge. While many parents need and appreciate transfer of information, this unidirectional process lacks the characteristics of a learning organization, where people's capacity to learn exists at all levels (Senge, 2006). In schools, this includes children, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members – all those who have an investment in the outcome of education. This multidimensional approach takes into account the tacit nature of knowledge. Systems thinking integrates this approach and encompasses the

boundaries at which participants interact in both organized and casual ways. Learning in these borderlands surpasses taking in information; learning at the boundaries generatively creates a future together.

Tacit Knowledge

Communities that share boundaries must engage in relationship building and dialogue to make tacit knowledge explicit (Leonard-Barton, 1995; Polanyi, 1966; von Hippel, 1988; Zollo & Winter, 2002). Those involved in the dialogue must be willing to alter their own views to produce new learning. Programs that involve storytelling between parents and teachers, structured dialogue between parents and students, or communication between schools and community leaders across boundaries have the potential to generate learning. Family involvement practitioners and researchers agree that boundaries must be crossed for parent-school partnerships to take place (Davies, 1997; Epstein, 1990). Dialogue at these boundaries makes tacit knowledge explicit, and thus may help solve today's social problems and facilitate learning for both adults and children.

Many of the boundaries between parents and schools are perceived as walls rather than places to interact and learn. Empirical studies illustrate many barriers to communication and learning, particularly between working-class parents and schools (Crozier, 1999; Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 1996; Vincent, 2001). Kurt Lewin (1936) discussed the importance of understanding resistance at the boundary edge, suggesting that boundaries have different degrees of rigidity, elasticity, and solidity (pp. 123-124). Resistance in schools may take the form of a principal unwilling to engage at the boundaries or a teacher who views parents as a distraction from the work of education. Overcoming these obstacles will not be easy without new thinking by educational leaders who are willing to look at partnership with parents as an opportunity to garner diverse resources toward action that benefits children's learning and development. All relationships in the systemic framework of schools are viewed as having potential for social capital.

Social Capital

Social capital is a resource used to facilitate human action toward productive outcomes, obtained through the relationships of individuals in a social system (Coleman, 1988). Social capital includes people's degree of interconnectedness within a social network and the density of their social ties. Shared norms and expectations strengthen social ties. Dodd and Konzal (2002) attributed issues of trust and respect as foundational to building social capital within school communities. The metaphor "it takes a village to raise a child" depicts

an example of social capital between parents and schools. The more people tie together socially and interconnect because they value children's success in school and life, the greater potential for productive outcomes. If a teacher and parent know, trust, and respect one another, there is a greater likelihood that one will initiate contact with the other when needed to help the child.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) highlighted the importance of interconnectedness to social capital and underscored the advantages to individuals outside of the mainstream group. For example, lower income and ethnically diverse parents who traditionally have less access to resources for their children benefit greatly from social networks as a way of accruing benefits otherwise unavailable to them (Santana & Schneider, 2007). Educational research on social capital and trustworthiness between teachers, parents, and students has been linked to student academic success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, 2003).

Some studies illuminate a dark side of social capital and its potential negative effects in schools. Sil (2007) used critical theory to examine the unequal consequences of social capital that powerful parent groups have on those less connected. In his classic interpretation of the social capital wielded by influential mainstream residents of small-town Mansfield and its schools, Peshkin (1978) described the creation of an underserved, unhappy, and unrecognized group of families. The importance of examining interconnectedness and social capital are integral to a systemic way of thinking. Thus, exploration of how it is positively or negatively constructed for diverse socioeconomic and ethnic groups and utilized to benefit students is important to understanding parent–school partnerships.

Actionable Knowledge

Problem solving between parents, students, schools, and communities is complex and often requires more than simple solutions. Relevant dimensions of a problem, as seen by both parents and educators, must be explored to craft a solution that is reasonable and appropriate to the social contexts of the proposed action. Problem solving is linked to *actionable knowledge*, a concept that represents a pragmatic view of knowledge as expressed by the great educators William James (1907) and John Dewey (1916). The transforming of knowledge into action modifies the environment and propels people forward. Actionable knowledge comprises intellectual resources, both conscious and unconscious, and must bridge the divide between classes and categories of people through "the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another" (Dewey, 1916, pp. 400-401). Actionable knowledge is generated at peripheries between parents, schools, communities, and any other systems working to educate children.

Systems thinking focuses on relationships, not things or subjective rules. Thus, interpersonal relationships are central to generating actionable knowledge in organizations (Cross & Sproull, 2004); up to 95% of people studied in organizations credit their relationships with others, not designated experts, as contributing most to their decision-making and creation of new actionable knowledge (pp. 448-458). In their description of a synergistic paradigm for school communities, Dodd and Konzal (2002, pp. 125-127) emphasized relationship-building as paramount to new learning. Thus, social networks between parents, parents and schools, and schools and communities nurture actionable knowledge.

Networked Innovation

Networking and the concept of life as a web of human connection provide a useful metaphor for understanding social ecology and systems thinking and for viewing parent-school-community partnerships. The cycles of activity and communication between school and community organizations are remarkably reminiscent of the ecological lifecycles of systems theory (Hands, 2005). *Networked innovation* describes an organizational generative learning process that occurs through relationship building and communication free of reliance on hierarchical control (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). Human networks enable the transfer of knowledge across boundaries. In fact, boundary-spanning communication plays an important role in generating new ideas (Conway, 1995).

Innovation in parent-school communities is any collaborative process that creates positive change and improves the success of children. It means being collectively open to new ideas and solutions that enhance learning and development. An organization depends on intensive interactions with its environment to be innovative (Fagerberg, 2004). It is not difficult to bridge this learning to the field of education, realizing the importance of innovation generated in the peripheries between home and school.

Schools use email, bulletin boards, and newsletters to communicate with parents. While school-to-parent communication mostly transfers knowledge from school to home, the technological revolution facilitates not only access but also the capacity to create new knowledge (Castells, 1996). Fostered by the common goal of helping kids succeed, technology has potential implications for learning and innovation between parents and schools as they interact in the borderlands of cyberspace.

Communities of Practice

Teachers, principals, counselors, parents, and many others in the peripheral community share a common practice of educating the whole child. *Communities*

of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their understanding and knowledge of this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Communities of practice work at the boundaries between systems to build social capital, generate new knowledge, and nurture problem solving and innovation. Now an established concept of organizational science, communities of practice emphasize the learning that people do together rather than individual specialties or roles such as parent, teacher, administrator, or other expert. Community-of-practice boundaries are very flexible and membership includes whoever participates. Because these groups exchange and interpret information, they are ideal avenues for moving information across boundaries (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice differ from social networks because they specifically exist as a collective process of dialogic learning. For parents and schools to constitute a community of practice, they must value the knowledge and experience of one another and work through the structures and processes designed to collaborate across boundaries. The membership of communities of practice constantly changes as the communities create opportunities to share, learn, and apply new knowledge at home and in the classroom.

Family-school partnerships of the 21st century must go beyond equipping parents with skills and knowledge. It must involve them in the process of learning. Influenced by Vygotsky's theory of learning and development, Wells (2004) emphasized the importance of the "co-construction of knowledge by more mature and less mature participants engaging in activity together"(p. xii). This type of collaborative learning plays an important role in communities of practice.

Applying systems thinking to parents and schools naturally brings focus to the boundary dynamics between them and the many other common boundaries shared by those invested in educating today's young people. The relationship between parents and schools surpasses complementary to functional integration. Yet functional integration does not mean the two become one; instead, it means that the parents' role transcends participation and involvement toward the possibility of integration into the learning and knowledge creation process.

Implications for Research and Practice

To create and nurture parent-school partnerships different from their historical ancestors, a focus on leadership and learning is essential. The decisions that parents make about becoming more involved in education are highly influenced by schools (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Thus, school leadership

plays an important role in fostering relationships at the environmental boundaries that lead to generative learning and positive outcomes for children.

School principals, teachers, administrators, and others who work with parents must embrace the role of *boundary spanner,* learning how to build relationships that hover at the peripheries between home, school, and community. Research must explore these relationships and boundary spanning activities:

- What is the nature of boundary conflicts between parents and schools?
- How do parents, teachers, principals, counselors, and other helping professionals construct identity boundaries?
- How do they perceive boundaries within a school system? A family system? The collective school community?
- Under what conditions do teachers allow permeability of their identity boundaries to be influenced by parents, and vice versa?
- How does permeability change under stressful conditions?
- How do members of the learning community negotiate or balance their own identity and the collective identity?
- What systems of engagement are most effective over time, allowing for flexibility and change?

Further research may provide insights on these many questions.

Boundary dynamics between parents, schools, and communities are important because all members have an investment in positive youth development. Failure to encourage learning across these boundaries limits response to today's complex and ever-changing knowledge society. School principals can lead grassroots efforts toward partnership by creating opportunities for joint activities, problem solving, and dialogue in which parents and educators can learn and understand their different perspectives and seek alignment for action across boundaries. Border-crossing activities may include teacher visits to home environments, parent-teacher conferences approached from a perspective of mutuality, or structured opportunities for communities of practice between parents and educators. More research is needed to bring social capital, actionable knowledge, and networked innovation into the educational arena where they can nurture partnership formation.

Systemic change in the relationships and boundary dynamics of schools involves a call for more qualitative research within school communities. Action research influences system change via participation, self-determination, and knowledge generation (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Such participatory research aligns with the goals of creating parent-school partnerships by

- giving parents, teachers, and school leaders the shared responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating partnership practices;
- enabling them to develop a shared vision;

- taking into account each unique school culture; and
- allowing stakeholders to guide themselves from where they are toward the community they hope to become.

Indisputably, parental involvement no longer represents activities marginal to schooling young people. In fact, the integration of families into the learning and teaching process is one of the great hopes for the future of education. The knowledge society, the learning organization, and the information technology revolution represent trends that are bringing the family into the mainstream of education in ways never before experienced. These trends require expansion of current conceptual frameworks for understanding the relationship of parents to schools and schools to communities. This integration involves trial-and-error learning and nonlinear thinking from today's leaders and necessitates dialogue on the boundaries at which teaching and parenting meet to transfer knowledge across these boundaries to benefit future generations.

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Marilyn Price-Mitchell is a doctoral candidate in Human Development at Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, CA. She founded the nonprofit National ParentNet Association (http://www.parentinvolvementmatters.org/). Her research interests include systems theory, positive youth development and civic engagement, and family-school partnerships. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Marilyn Price-Mitchell, P. O. Box 11609, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, or mprice-mitchell@email.fielding.edu.

School Location, Student Achievement, and Homework Management Reported by Middle School Students

Jianzhong Xu

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether student achievement and school location may influence a range of homework management strategies. The participants were 633 rural and urban students in Grade 8. These homework management strategies include: (a) setting an appropriate work environment, (b) managing time, (c) handling distraction, (d) monitoring motivation, and (e) controlling negative emotion. Compared with low-achieving students, high-achieving students reported more frequently working to manage their workspace, budget time, handle distraction, monitor motivation, and control emotion while doing homework. Urban middle school students, compared with their rural counterparts, reported being more self-motivated during homework.

Key Words: homework management strategies, self-regulation, achievement, middle school students, rural, urban, schools, students' motivation, time, emotion, home, work environment, assignments, adolescents

Introduction

Understanding students' capacity to regulate their own learning (e.g., cognition, affects, actions, and features of the environment) has been a central topic of discussion among educators (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Boekaerts,

Maes, & Karoly, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). One important school task that has been closely associated with self-regulated learning is the task of doing homework (Cooper, 1989; Corno, 1996, 2000; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Warton, 2001; Xu, 1994, 2004; Xu & Corno, 1998), as homework is often viewed as one important vehicle for developing better study habits, better time organization, and greater self-direction (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Corno, 2000; Xu, 2004; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005).

Informed by Corno's model on volitional control (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Corno, 2001, 2004), several studies have examined a range of homework management strategies used by secondary school students, including arranging the environment, budgeting time, monitoring attention, monitoring motivation, and coping with negative affects (e.g., Xu, 2004, 2005, 2008b, 2008c; Xu & Corno, 2003, 2006). However, these studies did not investigate whether the use of homework management strategies was influenced by student achievement and school location.

The present study has linked student achievement and school location to homework management strategies. This line of research is important, as student academic achievement may be related to the use of self-regulated learning strategies in general and with certain homework strategies in particular (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). In addition, there is a need to examine the influence of school location on homework management, as rural students tend to have lower educational aspirations (e.g., Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989; Hu, 2003) and place less value on academics (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996; Stern, 1994) than non-rural students, which may influence the way they approach homework (i.e., homework completion behaviors and homework management strategies).

Related Literature

The present investigation was informed by two lines of related literature: (a) literature that alludes to a linkage between student achievement and homework management strategies, and (b) literature that points to the need to examine the use of homework management strategies across rural and urban settings.

Student Achievement and Homework Management

The first line of literature implies a possible linkage between student achievement and homework management strategies (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). For example, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons asked students to describe their use

of self-regulated learning strategies in their New York City school setting. The participants were 90 students in grades 5, 8, and 11, in a school for the academically gifted, along with an identical number from regular schools. The results indicated that gifted students, compared with regular students, made greater use of certain self-regulated learning strategies (e.g., organizing and transforming, seeking peer assistance, and reviewing notes).

More recently, Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2005) investigated the role of students' homework practice in their self-efficacy beliefs regarding their use of specific learning processes (e.g., organizing, memorizing, concentrating, and monitoring), perceptions of academic responsibility, and academic achievement. The participants were 169 girls from multi-ethnic, mixed socioeconomic status families in a parochial high school for girls in a large city.

Path analyses revealed that significant paths existed (a) from the quality of homework to the girls' self-efficacy for learning beliefs and their perceptions of student responsibility for academic outcomes, and (b) from these two academic beliefs to the girls' academic grade point average at the end of the school term. These findings suggested that student academic achievement was positively associated with the quality of homework practices, as indicated by advantageous homework practices (e.g., arranging the environment, setting priorities, planning ahead, and budgeting time).

The first line of literature suggests that student achievement may be positively related to the use of self-regulated learning strategies, in general, and with certain homework strategies, in particular. However, these studies involved limited samples in urban settings. In addition, they were not designed to examine the linkages between student achievement and a broad range of homework management strategies across rural and urban settings.

Educational Aspirations in Rural and Urban Settings

Over the past 20 years, research has indicated that the educational aspirations of rural youth lag behind those of their urban counterparts (Arnold et al., 2005; Cobb et al., 1989; Eider, 1963; Haas, 1992; Haller & Virkler, 1993; Hektner, 1994; Hu, 2003; Kampits, 1996; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997; Stern, 1994). For example, using descriptive statistics from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88), Hu examined educational aspirations and postsecondary access by students in urban and rural schools. Using 10th graders as a baseline population, the study found that higher percentages of rural students had aspirations for high school or below (16.6% for rural, in contrast to 11.0% for urban students) and for two-year college education (33.1% for rural, in contrast to 27.1% for urban students), and lower percentages of rural students had aspirations for four-year

college education or beyond (50.2% for rural, in contrast to 61.9% for urban students). The study also found that smaller percentages of students in rural schools were enrolled in postsecondary institutions (51.1% for rural, in contrast to 57.4% for urban students).

Related findings from other studies have further indicated that rural students place less value on academics (Ley et al., 1996; Stern, 1994). In a study of 2,355 students from 21 rural high schools in 21 states, Ley et al. asked students to indicate the importance of 21 attributes relating to their personal goals after high school. The data revealed that they placed more importance on personal qualities (e.g., being dependable and having the ability to get along with others) and less importance on specific areas of academic achievement (e.g., being proficient with basic English skills and math skills). It follows, then, that lower educational aspirations and less importance placed on academics could lead to a sense that "school isn't for me" (Haas, 1992). Specifically, this approach could lead to a sense that "homework isn't for me," as alluded to in one survey of 210 high school seniors in seven rural high schools (Reddick & Peach, 1993). This study found that whereas 91% of the students indicated that homework was directly related to what they were taught in class that day, only 37% felt that homework was beneficial.

The second line of literature suggests that, compared with urban students, rural students tend to have lower educational aspirations, place less value on academics, and have lower academic motivation (e.g., Arnold et al., 2005; Hu, 2003; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). These differences further suggest that rural and urban students may approach their homework differently (i.e., homework completion behaviors and homework management strategies), as students' perception of the instrumentality of the present academic tasks to obtain future goals (e.g., postsecondary educational opportunities) influence their use of self-regulation strategies, deep-processing study strategies, effort, and persistence (Miller & Brickman, 2004; Schutz, 1997).

Recently, several studies examined the use of homework management strategies in urban and rural settings. However, these studies employed either an all-urban sample (e.g., Xu & Corno, 2003) or an all-rural sample (e.g., Xu & Corno, 2006). Thus, there is a need to combine both a rural sample and an urban sample in one study, to allow a direct comparison of the use of homework management strategies across rural and urban settings, as rural students may perceive less utility for doing homework and may feel less compelled to do homework.

Consequently, there is a need to examine both location and student achievement in relation to a broad spectrum of homework management strategies in the same study. Specifically, are some strategies of homework management

more common than others? Do observed mean differences in homework management strategies vary by school location or student achievement?

Method

Participants

To address the criticism that previous homework research tended to focus on middle-class Caucasian students (e.g., Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998; Xu, 2005), the present study made an attempt to recruit districts with a student body from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents were contacted to secure their permission. The teachers administered the homework survey between the middle of October and early November, 2005. Overall, the survey response rate was 90.4%, and the racial/ethnic breakdown of the respondents was comparable to that of the school districts as a whole.

In the survey, students were asked about their level of academic achievement by selecting one choice that best described their grades across school subjects for the previous two years, including (1) *mostly A's*, (2) *mostly B's*, (3) *mostly C's*, (4) *mostly D's,* or (5) *below D*. This survey item was adapted from the NELS: 88. The only difference was that in NELS: 88, the students reported their grades in specific subjects (e.g., English), whereas the students in this survey reported their grades across all of their school subjects. The students' responses in this sample were *mostly A's* (28%), *mostly B's* (40%), *mostly C's* (24%), *mostly D's* (7%), and *below D* (2%). This percentage breakdown was similar to that of a large nationally representative sample of participants in NELS: 88, where the corresponding percentages for English, for example, were 31%, 38%, 23%, 6%, and 2%, respectively.

As it is logically possible that in some cases, for example, students with mostly C's and some A's may have an overall grade point average similar to those students with mostly B's and some D's, there is a need to provide a more definite comparison between two groups of students who varied in their academic achievement. Consequently, among 1,047 eighth graders who responded to the survey, two groups of students were included in the present study: (a) 288 students with mostly A's, and (b) 345 students with mostly C's or below.

Concerning the validity of students' self-reported grades, a recent study (Dickhaeuser & Plenter, 2005) showed very strong correlations ($r = .90$) between self-reported and actual academic performance (regardless of gender or achievement level), based on 866 students in grades 7 and 8. Meanwhile, the use of course grades as an important indicator of academic achievement is in line with other related studies in this area (e.g., Keith, Diamond-Hallam, & Fine, 2004; Singh, Granville, & Dika, 2002).

Of the 377 students in the rural sample, 48.3% were male and 51.7% were female. The sample was 68.7% Caucasian, 23.9% African American, 3.8% multiracial, 1.9% Asian American, 1.2% Native American, and .5% Latino. In the rural sample, 31.8% received free meals. These students were from several rural communities in the southeastern U.S., with a population density of 33 to 150 persons per square mile. The economic base of these communities rested in manufacturing, construction, retail trade, and agriculture (e.g., cotton, poultry, and soybeans). In these communities, a median household income ranged from about $23,000 to $48,000, and a median value of housing unit ranged from about $50,000 to $99,000.

Of the 182 students in the urban sample, 44.7% were male and 55.3% were female. The sample was 51.9% African American, 37.4% Caucasian, 5.3% multiracial, 2.4% Asian American, 1.5% Latino, and 1.5% Native American. In the urban sample, 32.2% received free meals. These students lived in a southeastern city with a population of about 180,000. The economic base of the city rested with several industries, including educational, health, and social services; retail trade; and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services. The city had a median household income of approximately $32,000 and a median value of housing unit of about $64,000.

Instrument

The students were asked about their homework management strategies, using the Homework Management Scale (HMS). The scale consisted of 22 items related to arranging the homework environment (e.g., "find a quiet place"), managing time (e.g., "set priorities and plan ahead"), handling distraction (e.g., "stop homework to send or receive instant messaging"), monitoring motivation (e.g., "find ways to make homework more interesting"), and controlling emotion (e.g., "calm myself down"). Possible responses for each item were *never* (scored 1), *rarely* (scored 2), *sometimes* (scored 3), *often* (scored 4), and *routinely* (scored 5). The five items of this scale were reversely scored (see Table 1).

Xu (2008c) examined the validity of scores on the HMS within the framework of structural equation modeling. Based on data from rural middle school students ($n = 699$), Xu conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the validity of the HMS structure. Factor-analytic results revealed that the HMS comprised 5 separate yet related factors: arranging the environment, managing time, handling distraction, monitoring motivation, and controlling emotion. This factor structure was then cross-validated with data from the urban middle school students ($n = 482$). With an established baseline model for the rural and urban samples, Xu further tested the validity of the multigroup model in which both baseline models were tested simultaneously, to determine evidence

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Homework Management

Subscale/Item	Item-total[a]	α (CI[b])	M	SD
Environment		.743 (.709, .774)	3.15	.90
1. Locate the materials I need for my homework	.449			
2. Find a quiet area	.557			
3. Remove things from the table	.536			
4. Make enough space for me to work	.573			
5. Turn off the TV	.430			
Time		.715 (.676, .750)	2.89	.88
6. Set priority and plan ahead	.495			
7. Keep track of what remains to be done	.542			
8. Remind myself of the available remaining time	.535			
9. Tell myself to work more quickly when I lag behind	.440			
Motivation		.809 (.784, .833)	2.67	.95
10. Find ways to make homework more interesting	.479			
11. Praise myself for good effort	.761			
12. Praise myself for good work	.744			
13. Reassure myself that I am able to do homework when I feel it is too hard	.539			
Emotion		.775 (.744, .802)	2.65	.92
14. Tell myself not to be bothered with previous mistakes	.556			
15. Tell myself to pay attention to what needs to be done	.614			
16. Tell myself to calm down	.561			
17. Cheer myself up by telling myself that I can do it	.584			
Distraction		.771 (.741, .799)	3.18	.95
18. Daydream during a homework session[c]	.564			
19. Start conversations unrelated to what I'm doing[c]	.617			
20. Play around with other things while doing my homework[c]	.574			
21. Stop homework repeatedly to find something to eat or drink[c]	.552			
22. Stop homework to send or receive instant messages[c]	.425			

[a]Item-total correlations. [b]The 95% percent confidence intervals for coefficient alpha were calculated using a method employing the central F distribution (see Fan & Thompson, 2001). [c]The item was reverse scored.

of invariance. Results revealed an adequate level of configural, factor loading, common error covariance, and intercept invariance across the rural and urban samples. For the rural and urban samples combined (n = 1,181), reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for scores on the five subscales ranged from .71 (for managing time) to .82 (for monitoring motivation).

The descriptive statistics for the rural and urban students in the present study are presented in Table 1. Reliability coefficients and the 95% confidence intervals for scores on each of the five subscales are included in this table. These reliability estimates (i.e., from .72 for managing time to .81 for monitoring motivation) are in the adequate to good range (Henson, 2001; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Item-total correlations ranged from .425 to .761 (mean item-total correlation = .551), indicating good homogeneity.

Data Analysis

One-way, within-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine whether some strategies of homework management were more common than others. I then conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) based on the principle that the dependent variables share a common conceptual meaning (Stevens, 2002). The MANOVA estimated effects of school location and student achievement on the five subscales of homework management. Student achievement was coded at two levels: Low (students with mostly C's or below) and high (students with mostly A's). School location was also coded at two levels: rural and urban. The dependent variables were mean scores on the five subscales of homework management (i.e., arranging the environment, managing time, handling distraction, monitoring motivation, and controlling emotion), which ranged from *never* (scored 1) to *routinely* (scored 5).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Averaging over items in each subscale, 42% of the students reported that they often or routinely made efforts to arrange their homework environment; 32% noted often or routinely managing time efficiently. Forty-three percent of the students reported often or routinely attempting to avoid internal distractions (e.g., daydreaming) or other activities that would distract them from homework. Of surveyed students, 25% said they often or routinely engaged in self-motivation or self-reward. Also, 24% said they often or routinely used coping strategies to monitor and control affect during homework. Thus, there was sufficient variance to warrant correlational analyses of these data.

Pearson correlations among the five subscales of HMS ranged from .11 between monitoring motivation and handling distraction to .63 between monitoring motivation and controlling emotion. Consistent with theoretical discussions (Corno, 2001) and previous empirical findings (Xu, 2006; Xu & Corno, 2003), all of the 10 correlations were statistically significant (see Table 2), suggesting common linkages across five homework management strategies (i.e., a common conceptual meaning for using MANOVA).

Table 2. Pearson Correlations among Five Subscales of Homework Management (N from 590 to 605)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Arranging the environment	—				
(2) Managing time	.56***	—			
(3) Handling distraction	.33***	.20***	—		
(4) Monitoring motivation	.41***	.53***	.11**	—	
(5) Controlling emotion	.44***	.56***	.15***	.63***	—

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Levels of Homework Management Across the Five Subscales

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics relating to the five subscales. One-way, within-subjects ANOVA revealed a significant difference among these five mean scores, $F(4, 551) = 47.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .254$. An adjusted Bonferroni post-hoc comparison detected specific differences among these subscales: These middle school students reported significantly more efforts in handling distraction ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .95$) and arranging their workspaces ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .90$) than they did in managing time ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .88$). Results further revealed that these students reported significantly more efforts in managing time than they did in monitoring motivation ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .95$) or in controlling emotion ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .92$).

School Location, Student Achievement, and the Five Subscales

The MANOVA results – using the five subscales of homework management as the dependent variables and with student achievement and school location as the independent variable – showed that school location and student achievement did not interact [Wilks's lambda = .980, $F(5,551) = 2.069$, $p = .068$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .018$]. On the other hand, the main effects of school location [Wilks's Lambda = .982, $F(5,551) = 2.291$, $p = .045$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .020$] and student achievement [Wilks's Lambda = .901, $F(5,551) = 12.089$, $p < .001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .099$] indicated significant effect on the combined dependent variables (see Table 3).

Table 3. Group Means and Standard Deviations for the Five Subscales of Homework Management

Characteristics		Environment	Time	Distraction	Motivation	Emotion	MANOVA Results
Student Achievement							Wilks's Λ = .901***
Low[a]	300	2.93 (.93)	2.64 (.82)	2.99 (.96)	2.58 (.95)	2.52 (.92)	
High[b]	259	3.40 (.79)	3.17 (.86)	3.40 (.90)	2.78 (.94)	2.80 (.90)	R^2 = .099
	F =	34.739***	43.727***	16.986***	7.503**	9.642**	
	η^2 =	.059	.073	.030	.013	.017	
School Location							Wilks's Λ = .980*
Rural	377	3.17 (.91)	2.91 (.91)	3.18 (.95)	2.62 (.94)	2.66 (.94)	
Urban	182	3.11 (.86)	2.85 (.80)	3.19 (.95)	2.79 (.97)	2.64 (.89)	R^2 = .020
	F =	.564	.664	.002	4.317*	.031	
	η^2 =	.001	.001	.000	.008	.000	

[a]Mostly C's or below
[b]Mostly A's
* $p < .05.$ ** $p < .01.$ *** $p < .001$

Separate univariate tests were performed to compare the effects of school location (rural vs. urban) on the five subscales of homework management. The results showed statistically significant effects on one subscale of homework management, namely, monitoring motivation [$F(1,555) = 4.317$, $p = .038$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$]. As indicated in Table 3, urban middle school students reported being more self-motivated during homework than their rural counterparts.

In addition, univariate tests were performed to compare the effects of the two levels of student achievement (high vs. low) on the five subscales of homework management strategies. Univariate tests showed statistically significant effects on all five dependent variables, namely, on arranging the environment [$F(1,555) = 34.739$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$], managing time [$F(1,555) = 43.727$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .073$], handling distraction [$F(1,555) = 16.986$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .030$], monitoring motivation [$F(1,555) = 7.503$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$], and controlling emotion [$F(1, 555) = 9.642$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .017$]. As indicated in Table 3, compared with low-achieving students, high-achieving students reported more frequently working to arrange the environment, manage time, cope with distractions, monitor motivation, and control their own emotions during homework sessions.

Discussion

The present study examined whether student achievement and school location were related to a range of homework management strategies as reported by middle school students. As hypothesized, student achievement appeared related to all five subscales of homework management. Specifically, compared with low-achieving students, high-achieving students reported more frequently working to manage their workspace, budget time, handle distraction, monitor motivation, and control emotion while doing homework. In addition, compared with rural middle school students, urban middle school students reported more frequently working to be self-motivating during homework.

In line with previous findings that student achievement was positively related to the use of self-regulated learning strategies in general and with certain homework practices in particular (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990), the present study took one step further, suggesting that student achievement may be positively associated with a broad range of homework management strategies, including managing the environment, budgeting time, handling distraction, monitoring motivation, and controlling emotion while doing homework.

The finding that rural students took significantly less initiative in monitoring their motivation is in line with relevant findings from the existing literature on educational aspiration of rural youth (e.g., Arnold et al., 2005; Cobb et al., 1989; Hu, 2003). As rural youth display more hesitancy about graduating from high school and going on to college, they may place less importance on academics and homework assignments. In turn, this "homework isn't for me" approach may make them less likely to strive to be self-motivating while doing homework. This explanation is also consistent with related research showing that educational aspiration of students may influence the strategies they use to engage in studying and the level of effort they devote to that work (Miller & Brickman, 2004; Schutz, 1997; Schutz & Lanehart, 1994).

It is intriguing that, related to the other four subscales of the HMS, there were no statistically significant differences between the rural and urban middle school students. One possible explanation is that the role of educational aspirations in homework management behavior is less pronounced at the middle school level, as middle school students are more removed from their future goal attainment such as postsecondary educational opportunities (Xu, 2008c).

Another possible explanation is that there are fewer substantial differences in educational aspirations between rural and urban middle school students (Hu, 2003). This explanation is, to some extent, substantiated by findings from Hektner's (1995) study, which revealed that rural middle school students, when asked how they felt when thinking about their future, reported higher levels of curiosity and confidence than rural high school students, whereas their non-rural counterparts' ratings in these two areas increased from the middle school level to the high school level. Thus, another contribution of the present study is that it raises an important question concerning the role of educational aspiration on homework management strategies for rural and urban students at their different developmental stages.

It is important to note that the findings of the present study were based on a sample of students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the percentage of the rural students who received free meals (31.8%) was similar to that of the urban students (32.2%), which, in turn, was very close to the national average (32.3%; Common Core of Data, 2005-2006).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the present findings are based on self-reported data. Another limitation relates to the issue of causation, a limitation facing many non-experimental studies (Winship & Sobel, 2004). Other predictor variables (e.g., adult monitoring and perception of instrumentality of academic tasks) might have an effect on homework management strategies had they been included.

The present study is the first known to employ both a rural middle school sample and an urban middle school sample in one study, thereby allowing direct comparisons of homework management strategies in these two settings, so there is a need to continue the line of research at the middle school level in other rural and urban settings. There is also a need to examine the use of homework management strategies across rural and urban settings at the high school level, as the role of educational aspirations in homework behaviors may be more pronounced at this level (Hektner, 1995; Xu, 2008c).

Another line of research should further explore the linkages between student academic achievement and homework management strategies. In addition to cross-sectional survey studies, it would be important to conduct longitudinal, non-experimental studies that follow cohorts of students to examine the linkages between academic achievement and homework management strategies over time. Similarly, other methods such as a diary study, think aloud, the experience sampling method (e.g., Shumow, Schmidt, & Kackar, 2008), and qualitative case studies (e.g., Xu & Corno, 1998) would be informative in deepening our understanding in the area of how and under what conditions students at different achievement levels manage their homework over time.

Practical Implications

The finding that high-achieving students (i.e., those students with mostly A's) made greater use of all five subscales of homework management strategies is noteworthy. The achievement of these students in school implies that these homework management strategies may have the potential to help students become more effective learners in general, not just help them complete homework assignments responsibly. It follows, then, that it may be beneficial for middle schools to provide more explicit and systematic instructions to students about how to promote responsible homework behaviors. Possible topics of these instructions might include, for example, organizing the workspace, setting priorities, planning ahead, staying focused, enhancing homework intention, and coping with unwanted emotions surrounding homework tasks. In addition, middle schools may wish to provide more explicit instructions about how to handle homework distractions, as concern over homework distractions has been growing as electronic media offer new and ever-increasing diversions while doing homework, for example, web surfing, online chatting, text messaging, and blogging (Foehr, 2006; Warton, 2001; Wallis, 2006; Xu, 2007, 2008c; Xu & Corno, 2003). There is also a need for middle schools to reexamine their homework practices and to design homework assignments that are more interesting and engaging (Warton, 2001; Xu, 2008a), as the use of homework management strategies are positively associated with homework interest (Xu, 2007).

The present study revealed that, compared with rural middle school students, urban middle school students more frequently worked to monitor their motivations. Thus, there is a need for families in rural settings to pay particular attention to their children and to help them maintain motivation and engagement during homework. Such an approach is important, as parental involvement and attitudes can play a significant role in influencing student attitudes toward their homework (Cooper et al., 1998; Xu, in press) and as family support can make a difference in helping rural students monitor their motivation while doing homework (Xu & Corno, 2006). In addition, it appears likely that rural families would benefit from guidance from middle schools on how to keep students motivated while doing homework, as rural parents reported that they were more concerned about helping children develop positive attitudes about homework than assisting them with the academic content of their homework (Reetz, 1991). Finally, both rural and urban families would benefit from guidance from middle schools on how to monitor homework motivation and cope with potentially interfering emotions, as results from the present study revealed that middle school students took significantly less initiative in these two subscales than in the other three subscales: arranging the work environment, managing time, and handling distraction.

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Jianzhong Xu is a professor in the Department of Leadership and Foundations at Mississippi State University. His research interests focus on teaching and learning in the school and home setting, in home-school relationships, and in partnerships with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Jianzhong Xu, Department of Leadership and Foundations, Box 6037, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS, 39762, or jx18@colled.msstate.edu.

Seeking the Sense of Community: A Comparison of Two Elementary Schools' Ethical Climates

Kay A. Keiser and Laura E. Schulte

Abstract

School climate is created through the combined culture of the adults and students within a school – both the culture they share as an organization and the diverse cultures they bring from home. This study compared the school climate of two elementary schools, one urban and one suburban, by measuring 179 fourth and fifth grade students' and 65 teachers' perceptions of their schools' ethical climates. The Elementary School Ethical Climate Index (ESECI) was utilized to factor perceptions into *teacher to student, student to teacher/learning environment,* and *student to student* interactions. For each of the ESECI subscales, two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with a respondent factor (student or teacher/staff) and a community type factor (urban or suburban). While both the urban and suburban schools reported positive perceptions of school culture by students and teachers, the urban teachers were significantly less positive than their suburban peers in *student to teacher/learning environment* and *student to student* interactions, and also significantly less positive than their urban students. Results emphasize the importance of evaluating the culture of the school in an intentional, thorough manner by asking all groups for perceptions of school climate and utilizing what is uncovered to strengthen the sense of community.

Key Words: ethical climates, elementary schools, sense of community, students, teachers, learning environments, urban, suburban, cultures, perceptions

Introduction

As school leaders seek ways to improve schools and districts, creating a positive school climate is essential. Increasing academic performance, enhancing social and emotional skills, and even retaining quality teachers are all related to positive school climate, but trying to understand the complex patterns and subtle norms which create that climate can be perplexing (Belenardo, 2001; Osher & Fleischman, 2005). While containing elements of school safety, environment, teaching, and learning (Cohen, 2007), the heart of school climate may be defined as "the quality and consistency of interpersonal interaction within the school community that influences children's cognitive, social, and psychological development" (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997, p. 322).

It is through these interactions that relationships are formed and a sense of community arises. Belenardo (2001) identifies the elements of a sense of school community as shared values, commitment, a feeling of belonging, caring, interdependence, and regular contact. Perceptions of the school community will vary among individuals, but as they identify with their school and their role in the culture, common features of the group norms become evident (Griffith, 2000; Royal & Rossi, 1999).

Schools that display the shared values of fairness, justice, respect, cooperation, and compassion have a positive sense of community, supporting and motivating both teachers and students (Bushnell, 2001; Furman, 1998; Keiser & Schulte, 2007; Noddings, 1992; Osher & Fleischman, 2005; Schulte et al., 2002; Schulte, Shanahan, Anderson, & Sides, 2003).

Thus by evaluating school climate through the lens of ethical principles, higher quality relationships and a sense of school community may emerge (Noddings, 1988, 1992). The five ethical principles include: respect for autonomy (allowing a person to act independently); nonmaleficence (doing no harm to others); beneficence (benefiting others); justice (treating others fairly); and fidelity (being faithful and trustworthy). At the heart of these principles lies respect for persons (Kitchener, 1984, 1985). In an earlier study (Keiser & Schulte, 2007), we described the development and validation of the Elementary School Ethical Climate Index (ESECI), which will be used in this study to measure the ethical climate of two elementary schools.

While the sense of community resides in the culture and relationships within the school, associations from the surrounding neighborhood may also have an effect (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005). Schaps, Lewis, and Watson (1997) found generally that schools serving low-income students demonstrated a lower sense of classroom community than those in more affluent neighborhoods but that remarkable exceptions

exist. While urban and rural school climates have been studied (Esposito, 1999; Little & Miller, 2007; Osher & Fleischman, 2005; Patchen, 2006; Patterson et al., 2007; Warren, 2002), the role that the surrounding culture plays in school climate continues to deserve attention.

Research Questions

We addressed the following research questions during this study: (1) What are elementary school student and teacher/staff perceptions of the ethical climate of their school? (2) Are there differences between elementary school student and teacher/staff perceptions of the ethical climate of their school based on the community socioeconomic status?

Method

Participants

Fourth and fifth grade students and teachers/staff from an urban and a suburban elementary school participated in the study.

Urban School

At the urban school, 74 out of 92 students (40 fourth and 34 fifth graders) participated in the study. Fifty-three percent of the students were males, and 47% were females. The ethnicity of the students included 41% Caucasian Americans, 36% African Americans, and the remainder were Hispanic, Native, or Asian Americans. Approximately 63% of the students at the urban school qualified for free or reduced lunch at the time of the study. At the urban school, 43 out of 60 teachers/staff participated in the study. Of the teachers/staff responding, 97% were females, and 95% were Caucasian. The majority (71%) of the teachers/staff were 50 years of age or younger, and 67% had taught at the surveyed school for more than 3 years.

Suburban School

At the suburban school, 105 out of 110 students (59 fourth and 46 fifth graders) participated in the study. Of the students, 47% were males, and 53% were females. Approximately 96% of the students were Caucasian Americans, and 16% qualified for free or reduced lunch at the time of the study. At the suburban school, 22 (100%) teachers participated in the study. Of the teachers, 77% were females, and 100% were Caucasian. The majority (64%) of the teachers were 50 years of age or younger, and 77% had taught at the surveyed school for more than 3 years.

Data Collection Procedures

At both schools, students completed the Elementary School Ethical Climate Index (ESECI) in their classrooms, and the teachers/staff completed the ESECI during a teacher/staff meeting. The data collection procedures are documented in our previous article about the development and validation of the ESECI:

> The survey information included (a) a cover letter that explained the purposes of the study and informed the students and teachers/staff that participation was voluntary and that responses would be anonymous, (b) demographic questions used to describe the students and teachers/staff, and (c) the ESECI. Before distributing the survey information, we received approval from the principal at the schools, each school district's research personnel, and the university's research review board. We received a signed consent form from the parent(s) of each student who participated in the study. The participants responded to the ESECI items by giving their perception of their school's ethical climate based on their experiences and/or the experiences of their peers. They considered how true each ESECI item was in their school using the following response scale: 1 = rarely or never true, 2 = seldom true, 3 = sometimes true, 4 = often true, and 5 = usually or always true. (Keiser & Schulte, 2007, p. 77)

Instrument

The 38-item ESECI assesses the ethical climate of an elementary school across five ethical principles: respect for autonomy; nonmaleficence; beneficence; justice; and fidelity (Keiser & Schulte, 2007; see Table 1). The ESECI items apply the five ethical principles within three types of interactions and relationships between students and teachers, specifically *teacher to student* (i.e., how teachers interact with and relate to students), *student to teacher/learning environment* (i.e., how students interact with and relate to teachers), and *student to student* (i.e., how students interact with and relate to other students; Brown & Krager, 1985; Kitchener, 1984, 1985; Schulte et al., 2002). The ESECI item development and content validity procedures ensure that the ESECI is an appropriate instrument for measuring the ethical climate of elementary schools. In our validation study (Keiser & Schulte, 2007) we found that the ESECI subscales, *teacher to student*, *student to teacher/learning environment*, and *student to student,* had acceptable reliability coefficients (using Cronbach's alpha) of .96, .89, and .87, respectively.

Table 1. ESECI Items Listed by Subscale

Elementary School Ethical Climate Index Item
Teacher to Student
1. Teachers praise students for excellent work.
2. Teachers help students improve their study habits.
3. Teachers make students feel safe.
4. Teachers treat all students with respect.
5. Teachers encourage students to ask appropriate questions.
6. Teachers give students the chance to practice what they learn.
7. Teachers are well prepared.
8. Teachers are positive role models for students.
9. Teachers respect the differences of all students.
10. Teachers set high expectations for good behavior.
11. Teachers are available to help students.
12. Teachers help students with special needs.
13. Teachers return assignments in a reasonable amount of time.
14. Students who have questions about assignments feel free to talk to their teachers.
15. Teachers help students when they have a problem.
16. Teachers encourage cooperation among students.
17. Teachers grade assignments fairly.
18. Teachers allow students to express their ideas.
19. Students can depend on their teachers.
Student to Teacher/Learning Environment
1. Students follow directions.
2. Students perform their personal best on their school work.
3. Students are respectful to teachers.
4. Students actively participate in class activities.
5. Students pay attention during class.
6. Students learn from their mistakes.
7. Students are trusted by their teachers.
8. Students cooperate with their teachers.
9. Students enjoy learning from their teachers.
10. Students treat their teachers fairly.
11. Students respect things that belong to their classmates.
Student to Student
1. Students help their classmates even if it means more work for themselves.
2. Students encourage their classmates to do their best.
3. When working in a group with their classmates, students do their fair share of the work.
4. Students treat their classmates with respect.
5. Students stick up for classmates who are being picked on by others.
6. All students are accepted by their classmates.
7. Students will get help if they see others in a fight.
8. Students feel free to stand up for what they believe, even if it's not popular.

Data Analyses

We conducted the following statistical analyses to investigate the differences between student and teacher/staff perceptions of each school's ethical climate based on the community socioeconomic status:

1. We summarized the respondents' perceptions of the ethical climate of their school by calculating mean scores for each of the ESECI subscales.
2. For each of the ESECI subscales, we conducted two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with a respondent factor (student or teacher/staff) and a community type factor (urban or suburban). A .05 level of significance was employed.

Results

Student Perceptions of Their School's Ethical Climate

Urban School

Students' perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 4.47, *SD* = 0.67) were the most positive with ratings of often to usually true. Their perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* (*M* = 3.92, *SD* = 0.71) and *student to student* (*M* = 3.90, *SD* = 0.78) interactions and relationships were positive with ratings of often true.

Suburban School

Students' perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 4.49, *SD* = 0.44) were the most positive with ratings of often to usually true. Their perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 0.54) were positive with ratings of often true. Their perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = 0.67) were somewhat positive with ratings of sometimes to often true.

Teacher/Staff Perceptions of Their School's Ethical Climate

Urban School

As reported in our previous study (Keiser & Schulte, 2007):

…teacher/staff perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 4.33, *SD* = 0.46) were the most positive with ratings of often to usually true. Their perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships (*M* = 3.54, *SD* = 0.50) were somewhat positive with ratings of sometimes to often true. Their perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 3.26, *SD* = 0.51) were the least positive with ratings of sometimes true. (p. 83)

Suburban School

Teacher perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 4.63, *SD* = 0.43) were the most positive with ratings of often to usually true. Their perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.47) were positive with ratings of often true. Their perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = 0.60) were somewhat positive with ratings of sometimes to often true.

Differences Between Student and Teacher/Staff Perceptions of the Ethical Climate Across Schools

Table 2 lists the means and standard deviations of the ESECI subscales for the students and teachers/staff broken down by school.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the ESECI Subscales for the Students and Teachers/Staff Broken Down by School

Teacher to Student Subscale			
Respondent	*School*	*Mean*	*SD*
Student	Urban	4.47	0.67
	Suburban	4.49	0.44
Teacher/Staff	Urban	4.33	0.46
	Suburban	4.63	0.43
Total	Urban	4.42	0.60
	Suburban	4.51	0.44
Student To Teacher/Learning Environment Subscale			
Respondent	*School*	*Mean*	*SD*
Student	Urban	3.92	0.71
	Suburban	3.99	0.54
Teacher/Staff	Urban	3.54	0.50
	Suburban	4.03	0.47
Total	Urban	3.78	0.66
	Suburban	4.00	0.52
Student to Student Subscale			
Respondent	*School*	*Mean*	*SD*
Student	Urban	3.90	0.78
	Suburban	3.69	0.67
Teacher/Staff	Urban	3.26	0.51
	Suburban	3.75	0.60
Total	Urban	3.67	0.76
	Suburban	3.70	0.65

Teacher to Student

The two-way ANOVA comparing student and teacher/staff perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships across the two elementary schools indicated that the interaction between respondent and school and the main effect for respondent were not statistically significant, $F(1, 240) = 3.491$,

$p = .063$; $F(1, 240) < 0.0005$, $p = .998$, respectively. However, the main effect for school was statistically significant with a small effect size, $F(1, 240) = 4.086$, $p = .044$, $d = 0.17$ (see Table 3). This significant main effect indicated that the student and teacher/staff perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships at the suburban school ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.44$) were slightly more positive than those at the urban school ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.60$). At both schools, students and teacher/staff perceptions of *teacher to student* interactions and relationships were very positive with ratings of often to usually true.

Student to Teacher/Learning Environment

The two-way ANOVA comparing student and teacher/staff perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships across the two elementary schools indicated that the interaction between respondent and school and the main effect for school were both statistically significant, $F(1, 240) = 5.391$, $p = .021$; $F(1, 240) = 10.06$, $p = .002$, respectively. The main effect for respondent was not statistically significant, $F(1, 240) = 3.688$, $p = .056$ (see Table 3).

To follow-up the statistically significant interaction between respondent and school, simple main effects tests were conducted. The simple main effects tests comparing respondents at each school indicated that at the suburban school there was not a statistically significant difference between students ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.54$) and teachers ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.47$) in their perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships with positive ratings of often true for both groups, $F(1, 240) = 0.067$, $p = .796$. In contrast, at the urban school the simple main effects tests indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.71$) and teachers/staff ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.50$) with student ratings of often true and teacher/staff ratings of sometimes to often true, $F(1, 240) = 11.227$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.63$. Urban student ratings were more positive than urban teacher/staff ratings ($d > .40$) on the following ESECI *student to teacher/learning environment* items:

➢ Students perform their personal best on their school work.
➢ Students are respectful to teachers.
➢ Students learn from their mistakes.
➢ Students treat their teachers fairly.
➢ Students respect things that belong to their classmates.

The simple main effects tests comparing schools for each group of respondents indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between urban ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.71$) and suburban ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.54$) student perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships with ratings of often true for both urban and suburban students, $F(1,$

240) = 0.719, p = .397. In contrast, the urban teacher/staff (M = 3.54, SD = 0.50) perceptions of *student to teacher/learning environment* interactions and relationships were significantly less positive than the suburban teacher perceptions (M = 4.03, SD = 0.47) with urban teacher/staff ratings of sometimes to often true and suburban teacher ratings of often true, F(1, 240) = 10.075, p = .002, d = 1.01. The urban teacher/staff ratings were less positive than the suburban teacher ratings (d > .40) on all ESECI *student to teacher/learning environment* items except "Students enjoy learning from their teachers."

Student to Student

The two-way ANOVA comparing student and teacher perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships across the two elementary schools indicated that the interaction between respondent and school and the main effect for respondent were both statistically significant, F(1, 240) = 11.509, p = .001; F(1, 240) = 7.832, p = .006, respectively. The main effect for school was not statistically significant, F(1, 240) = 1.815, p = .179 (see Table 3).

To follow up on the statistically significant interaction between respondent and school, simple main effects tests were conducted. The simple main effects tests comparing respondents at each school indicated that at the suburban school there was not a statistically significant difference between students (M = 3.69, SD = 0.67) and teachers (M = 3.75, SD = 0.60) in their perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships with ratings of sometimes to often true for both groups, F(1, 240) = 0.147, p = .702. In contrast, at the urban school the simple main effects tests indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students (M = 3.90, SD = 0.78) and teachers/staff (M = 3.26, SD = 0.51) with student ratings of often true and teacher/staff ratings of sometimes true, F(1, 240) = 23.910, p < .0005, d = 0.99. Urban student ratings were more positive than urban teacher/staff ratings (d > .40) on all of the ESECI *student to student* items except "Students will get help if they see others in a fight."

The simple main effects tests comparing schools for each group of respondents indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between urban (M = 3.90, SD = 0.78) and suburban (M = 3.69, SD = 0.67) student perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships with ratings of often true for urban students and sometimes to often true for suburban students, F(1, 240) = 4.164, p = .042, d = 0.29. Urban student ratings were more positive than suburban student ratings (d > .40) on the following ESECI *student to student* item: "When working in a group with their classmates, students do their fair share of the work." For teachers/staff the simple main effects tests were also statistically significant with urban teacher/staff (M = 3.26, SD = 0.51) perceptions of *student to student* interactions and relationships less positive than

the suburban teacher perceptions (M = 3.75, SD = 0.60), $F(1, 240)$ = 7.499, p = .007, d = 0.88. Urban teachers/staff gave ratings of sometimes true, while suburban teachers gave ratings of sometimes to often true. Urban teacher/staff ratings were less positive than suburban teacher ratings (d > .40) on all of the ESECI *student to student* items except "Students encourage their classmates to do their best" and "All students are accepted by their classmates."

Table 3. Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) and Simple Main Effects Tests Results of the ESECI Subscales

Teacher to Student Subscale					
Source	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Respondent	<0.0005	1	<0.0005	<0.0005	.998
School	1.120	1	1.120	4.086	.044
Resp. by School	0.957	1	0.957	3.491	.063
Error	65.767	240	0.274		
Student to Teacher/Learning Environment Subscale					
Source	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Respondent	1.257	1	1.257	3.688	.056
School	3.430	1	3.430	10.060	.002
Resp. by School	1.838	1	1.838	5.391	.021
Resp. at Suburban	0.023	1	0.023	0.067	.796
Resp. at Urban	3.828	1	3.828	11.227	.001
School at Student	0.245	1	0.245	0.719	.397
School at Teacher	3.435	1	3.435	10.075	.002
Error	81.821	240	0.341		
Student to Student Subscale					
Source	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Respondent	3.582	1	3.582	7.832	.006
School	0.830	1	0.830	1.815	.179
Resp. by School	5.264	1	5.264	11.509	.001
Resp. at Suburban	0.067	1	0.067	0.147	.702
Resp. at Urban	10.936	1	10.936	23.910	<.0005
School at Student	1.905	1	1.905	4.164	.042
School at Teacher	3.430	1	3.430	7.499	.007
Error	109.771	240	0.457		

Discussion

While generalizations to other schools and communities may not be made from the results of two schools, it was interesting to note that in both the urban and suburban schools studied, teachers did not mirror student perceptions of the school climate. In reviewing Table 2, every subscale was higher for urban students' responses than their teachers. In the suburban school, students' scores were lower on all subscales than their teachers. There were significant differences in *student to teacher/learning environment* and *student to student* subscales

in the urban school. On the other hand, for the staff of the suburban school the difference from students was not statistically significant. Generally, more suburban school teachers live in the community and culture that they teach in than do teachers in urban schools, which might account somewhat for these results (Gehrke, 2005; Patterson et al., 2007; Warner & Washburn, 2004).

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for suburban, middle-class teachers to hold negative beliefs about students in urban schools. Gilbert's (1997) study found that preservice teachers viewed urban students as "unmotivated, unwilling, and disruptive participants in schooling" (p. 93). This led to beliefs that urban schools need strict discipline and basic skills curriculum. Warren's (2002) interviews with teachers showed that teachers believed that students' cultures were deficits and that teachers lacked the confidence and determination to overcome differences and work with urban students. Teachers' expectations thus become a broader social force and a powerful influence on students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). If staff members hold negative perceptions of students, this can lead to a less positive climate, as staff holds the ability to shape the school culture (Gehrke, 2005).

As the perceptions of the staff leads to self-fulfilling prophesy (Diamond et al., 2004; Lumsden, 1997), higher as well as lower perceptions of school climate by the adults can have adverse effects upon the students. If, as in the suburban school, teachers see the climate as more positive, then strategies that could improve students' sense of community may be ignored as unneeded. Even when a positive community seems to be without problems, exclusionary, homogenizing, and coercive forces may be masked if all members are not invited to report their views (Bushnell, 2001).

Implications for Action and Further Study

Further study needs to be conducted on the interaction of socioeconomic status and the relationships that create the school's sense of community. In this study, the lower income neighborhood of the urban school did not seem to have a major influence upon the school climate, as students and teachers both reported their perceptions to be positive. Successful schools are able to create a positive climate by sustaining caring connections, providing positive behavioral supports, and teaching social and emotional skills (Oscher & Fleischman, 2005). As Noonan (2004) affirms:

> If there is a common thread to creating a positive school climate, it is the importance of relationships – student to student, teacher to student, teacher to family, administrator to staff, school to community…and our ability to teach our students how to develop supportive relationships of their own is as essential a skill as math and reading. (p. 65)

Therefore, it is not enough for school leaders to informally assess school climate. Without an accurate, ongoing measure from all school groups, assumptions can lead to a distorted sense of community. While Cohen (2007) states that over 90% of school leaders believe that school climate needs to be evaluated, it is not enough to rely upon feelings or intuition to estimate it. Whatever measure that is selected should be valid and reliable, seeking the perceptions of all school groups, and moving beyond issues of increasing school safety and appreciating diversity to seeking a sense of feeling connected within the school community.

Once climate is assessed, action is imperative. School leaders may build upon strengths through reexamining school traditions to foster a sense of community, through promoting school-wide activities that celebrate learning, through pairing older and younger students, and through encouraging service (Benton & Bulach, 1995; Schaps et al., 1997). Self-awareness and self-reflection by both the teachers and students can lead toward cultural proficiency (Gehrke, 2005; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999). By following a plan with both short-term goals and long-term benchmarks to develop a positive school community, not only can the academic environment improve, but trust, respect, and caring can become the ethical foundation for our students and our future.

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Kay A. Keiser is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Dynamic leadership, teaching dispositions, and individualization of instruction are her research interests. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Kay Keiser, University of Nebraska at Omaha KH414, 6001 Dodge, Omaha, NE, 68182, or to kkeiser@unomaha.edu.

Laura E. Schulte has recently retired as professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where she taught research and statistics courses and worked with students pursuing master's and doctoral degrees. Her research areas of interest include the ethical climate of educational institutions, educator dispositions, and scale development.

A Case Study of School-Community Alliances that Rebuilt a Community

Sharon M. Brooks

Abstract

This case study examines how the leadership of a principal in the worst elementary school in her district, located in what William J. Wilson describes as a socially dislocated African American community, worked to change the nature of an entire community by transforming how she and her faculty communicated with parents. Drawing on data gathered from teachers, parents, and the principal through semi-structured interview questions, observations, and documentation, this study provides a vivid example of how school leaders can work effectively with the community to create meaningful change in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools.

Key Words: social dislocation, Traditional African American Schools, alliances, parental involvement, community collaboration, businesses, law enforcement, media, elementary school, turnaround leadership, principals, urban, large districts, teachers, parents, case study, interviews, change, neighborhoods

Introduction

In the movie *Back to the Future,* the characters had to return to the past in order to correct problems they were having in the present. As in the movie, sometimes educators must refer to successful school programs of the past in order to address problems prevalent in public schools today. This article will revisit the leader's roles in Traditional African American Schools (TAAS) in order

to help principals working today in diverse settings have a better understanding of how to build relationships with African American families.

In 1991, Kozol predicted that desegregation would have a devastating impact upon the African American community. Research by William J. Wilson (1988) supports Kozol's point. Wilson's findings showed that prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s most African Americans lived in segregated communities. Residents within these communities included poor, working-class, and middle-class families. Even so, 95% of them lived below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2000). By 1980, 54% of African Americans moved into the middle class (West, 1993). With the elimination of segregated housing, during the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of thousands of newly middle-class African American families left their old communities, leaving many poor parents alone to raise their children in communities inundated with negative influences. In fact, over 151,000 African Americans moved from African American ghettos located in five cities alone between 1954 and 1980 (Wilson, 1988).[1] This mass exodus created large pockets of extreme poverty.[2]

Wilson (1988, 1991) called this mass exodus and its impact upon the African American urban community the "theory of social dislocation." Families remaining in the African American urban communities became isolated in pockets of impoverishment. In these isolated communities, crime, joblessness, out-of-wedlock births, female-headed families, welfare dependency, drug culture, and high dropout rates became the norm rather than the exception within the community (Osterman, 1990; Wilson, 1988). Wilson surmised that once a community becomes socially dislocated, it cannot return to its former state without the return of the middle class.

However, while addressing social issues, Wilson's exodus theory did not address school desegregation's devastating effect upon urban African American communities. Desegregation in public schools led to the termination of Traditional African American Schools (TAAS). Traditional African American Schools were homogeneous schools that were prominent in many Midwestern and Southern states prior to the Civil Rights Acts of 1965. These schools were characterized by all African American teachers and students and were located within the communities they served. Although these schools were a part of the local school systems, they often had their own school boards and relied heavily upon the African American community for their economic survival.

Within the confines of the TAAS, principals, parents, and teachers played distinct roles in the children's education. Their reliance upon each other resulted in school communities that created and promoted African American school traditions (Phillipsen, 1994). According to research by Vivian and Curtis Morris (2000), "African American principals played the roles of superintendent,

school administrator, supervisor, family counselor, financial advisor, community leader, employer, and politician" (p. 15). Hence, their jobs extended beyond academics into providing services for entire families.

Meanwhile, the role of African American parents was to support teachers and the principal financially, but not to teach. They also prepared children at home in how to behave in school (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Parents only came to school upon request by a teacher or the principal. Parents were not required to attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer in classrooms, or help with homework (Siddle-Walker). Instead, they were free to visit unannounced to talk to the principal for individualized conferences. The parents' presence was expected when they needed to advocate against any inequities towards their children or towards their children's schools. Hence, in the Traditional African American School, being vocal on the behalf of one's child was not only acceptable and encouraged by school principals, it was expected of good parents. This finding is important because a study by Balkom (2002) revealed that many African American parents who presently live in socially dislocated communities still base their roles and the roles of principals upon standards set in TAAS, which often creates a disconnect between the home and integrated schools.

This disconnect began as a consequence of school desegregation and the firing of 91,009 African American teachers and administrators between 1954 and 1989 in the Midwest and the South (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Philipsen,1999). Even though the number of African American educators was drastically reduced (and in some districts completely eliminated), the number of African American students remained the same (HEW Report, cited in Ceceleski, 1994).

Fired African American educators were replaced by White teachers and administrators. One report by the Department of Health Education and Welfare found that between 1968 and 1971, 1,000 African American educators were dismissed from one school district while it simultaneously hired 5,000 White educators (Ceceleski, 1994). The disparity between White and African American teachers initiated by this firing still haunts principals today. Today, over 90% of teachers are White, while only 8.4% are African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) in comparison to 12% in the 1950s. The problem is that relationships traditionally formed between home and school in the African American community differed from parent-school relationships promoted in integrated schools.

Despite the fact that the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires schools to design parent roles based on the local community and national standards call on educational leaders to understand, respond to, and influence the community, both acts fail to recognize that in dominant society, principals' roles do not include addressing parents' social challenges (see Melmer, Burmaster,

James, & Wilhoit, 2008). Equally alarming is that principals may know what they are supposed to do, but just do not know how to do it, which shows the "dichotomy between theory and practice" (Osterman, cited in Sullivan & Glanz, 2005, vii), especially in regards to handling educators assigned to predominantly African American schools who have negative preconceived perceptions of children and their families (Fine & Weis, 1998; Howard, 2003; King, 1999). This confusion increases socially dislocated parents' alienation from mainstream America.

Alienation within the context of integrated schools had a negative economic impact upon urban African American communities, thus increasing social isolation. According to Shakeshaft (1993), the "integrated" school setting creates psychologically unsafe and sometimes hostile learning environments for African American children. Children experience "more frequent racism and loss of community" (Noddings, cited in Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999, p. 11). Students' reaction to their inhospitable environments is often poor performance or disassociation with learning (Ogbu, cited in Delpit, 1995), which leads to higher dropout rates. Lower school completion rates create a culture of unemployment. For instance, less than 27% of African American male high school dropouts find jobs in mainstream America, thus opening the door for crime and welfare dependency. Ironically (or paradoxically), although African American parents now have a greater need to advocate on their children's behalf, they actually have less accessibility to those in power (Fine & Weis, 2003).

The dilemma for African American parents is how to be recognized as good when their traditional roles for participation are no longer recognized as acceptable. Recognition is important because poor African American parents value education as much as White parents (Lewis, 2003; Fine & Weis, 1998; Robinson, 2001), and they are very involved in their children's education, despite the fact that they are not visible in their children's schools (Brooks, 2005; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The dilemma for today's administrators is how to incorporate traditional roles of African American parents into integrated settings.

While collecting data for a different research project, I learned that the neighborhood surrounding Mumford Academy was previously considered socially dislocated, yet it is now a thriving working-class and business community. Parents and teachers attribute this change to the Academy principal's alliances with the community. The principal stated that she based these alliances upon tactics learned from her experiences in TAAS. These tactics reconnected parents and the community to the school. Their reconnection fostered relationships between socially isolated parents and mainstream America. This knowledge framed the primary questions for this study; specifically, what alliances did the principal make, and what strategies were used to rebuild a socially dislocated community?

Methods

I used the qualitative case study format, because it enabled me to have "an in-depth study of a single or a few programs, events, activities, groups, or other entities defined in terms of time and place" (McMillan, 2004, p. 12) to gain greater insight into the strategies, practices, and policies utilized by the principal to improve the community. A purposive sample of 15 participants (8 teachers, 7 parents, and the principal) were interviewed. All participants responded privately to semi-structured interview questions during two-hour sessions. The principal was interviewed five times. Data also included field notes from observations of formal and informal interactions between parents, teachers, and/or the principal. I also used newspaper articles, local and state exam reports, school report cards, and school newsletters. (Please note: Within this article, all names of persons, places, and local publications are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.) The multiple data sources provided for triangulation. "Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 454; see also Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this case, data collected from the principal, parents, and teachers were compared against each other in order to validate the voices of others. Lastly, the data were analyzed with the constant comparison method. The school site selected for this study initially had less than ten parents attend its open house or parent-teacher conferences (Simon, 1994) when Dr. Hubbard arrived at Mumford Academy in the city of Bivens in 1994. Also in 1994, there were only 314 students enrolled in Mumford Academy; however, by 2003 there were 650 students enrolled with over a 90% parent participation rate (Brooks, 2005). At the time of this study, Dr. Hubbard had worked at Mumford Academy for 10 years.

Table 1: Context of Mumford Academy

Location - Large Urban City		1994	2004
Grade Levels		K-8	K-8
Students' Characteristics	Enrollment (Ages)	300 (5-14)	519 (5-14)
	Need Free & Reduced Lunch (%)	83	High 63
	Race/Ethnicity (%) African American	100	98
	Caucasian		1
	Asian American		1

Findings

This section describes how the principal, who attended TAAS, applied her previous knowledge of those schools' partnerships with the community to the situation at Mumford Academy. Dr. Hubbard's goal was to re-create this partnership despite the fact that 95% of her teachers lived in White suburban communities. This section shows the conditions of Mumford upon Dr. Hubbard's arrival, the strategies used to redefine it, the surrounding socially dislocated community, and the results of her efforts.

Mumford Academy: School Context in 1994

Mumford Academy housed grades kindergarten through eight. Prior to Dr. Hubbard's arrival, Mumford had approximately 300 students. It was surrounded by an impoverished homogeneous African American community inundated with crime, drugs, absentee landlords' rental properties, violence, single-parent households, and the very poor. Of Mumford's students, 83% qualified for free or reduced lunch. As described by one parent, "We had a lot of drug deals going on. We had drug houses up and down the street." The school was an extension of the impoverishment and violence. The school's grounds were often used for drug transactions. Although the violence and drugs were accepted as daily occurrences, even by the children, the teachers who taught them were often frightened and disillusioned by the environment. Teachers recalled crying daily enroute to and from work.

Likewise, teachers' expectations for students were low, reflecting their perceptions of Black inferiority: "Learning took place, but it was very minimal. If you gave an exam and the scores were low, it was, 'These kids couldn't do this,'" (Brooks, 2005, p. 166).[3] A parent said that initially, student performance was poor: "Half the children could not read, couldn't write, and spell" (Brooks, 2006, p. 483).

Parents were instructed to drop off their children at the door without entering the building. They could not observe in their children's classrooms. As stated by one parent, "You could not come in and sit in classrooms. I was told that it was distracting to the teacher" (Brooks, 2005, p. 167). They could only visit during open house and parent-teacher conferences. Teachers never held programs for them; the school's doors remained locked. Yet teachers were appalled when most parents refused to attend either open house or parent-teacher conferences. As a result, interactions between teachers and parents were often strained.

This strain made transiency rates high among teachers, principals, and students; loyalty was low. One teacher stated, "People were constantly moving in

and out" (Brooks, 2005, p. 169). This teacher began teaching at Mumford in November. She was her students' fourth teacher since September of that year. Transiency among principals was high as well. One teacher stated that in four years, the school had three different principals. A parent stated, "They were sending in principals that were basically working to increase their pensions. A lot of times they were absent, and the gym teacher would take over the principals' jobs because they weren't here" (Brooks, 2006, p. 484).

The feelings of hopelessness were summed up by Principal Hubbard, describing the conditions when she arrived: "Discipline, parent involvement, and student achievement were the lowest in the district. It was an ineffective environment: children were not learning, there were discipline problems, and the parents were not present" (Brooks, 2005, p. 170). Whether the previous principals ignored or were unaware of cultural differences among African Americans, the result was the same: An underperforming school remained in a socially isolated community with staff who did not know how to improve the situation.

Setting the Stage for Improvement

In 1992, the CEO of a Bivens' local bank stated that the growth or death of a city was dependent upon its schools. He said, "Good schools will help attract families to Bivens and will bolster property values and, hence, the city's tax rolls. Poor schools drive people away, undercut property values, and drain revenue from City Hall" (Stouffer, 1992, cited in Brooks, 2005, p. 172).

To prove his point, in 1993 this CEO pledged to build a partnership with the city's lowest underperforming public elementary school, Mumford Academy. The bank pledged $500,000 to Mumford annually under the conditions that it chose the principal from a national search, the school had a governing board which would act independently from the district's board, and the bank's funds would supplement, not replace, district funds to the school. The district agreed to the partnership as long as its superintendent and a representative for the teacher's union could be board members. Both agreed to the terms. One year later, Dr. Beverly Hubbard was hired.

At the time of her recruitment, Dr. Hubbard had been recognized as one of the top six secondary principals in the country and was ranked among the 100 most influential women in her city for her success in changing a failing, predominantly Latino urban middle school into an institution of high academic achievement. She taught classes at the university level and built alliances with community agencies, including the police department and social services. She also had over 13 years experience of using Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) in her building.

Beverly Hubbard, an African American woman, grew up in a very large urban housing project. She had a B.A. in Elementary Education, a M.A. in Guidance and Counseling, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration. Dr. Hubbard was a single parent. Dr. Hubbard firmly believed that parents had a right to participate in their children's education and expected them to be active in her building. She informed her teachers that they were accountable to both administrators and parents for doing their jobs well.

Dr. Hubbard also aided in the change process through the conditions of her initial contract. One condition was that the assistant superintendent with jurisdiction over her school sit in if the district superintendent was unable to attend the SBDM meetings, and that the teachers' union representative had to put the best interests of the children before commitments to his or her special interest group. She required that five parents, one community leader, and three teachers from Mumford Academy sit on the board. Dr. Hubbard also requested that the bank commit financial assistance for a minimum of eight years. She felt that total transformation would be achieved when the incoming kindergarteners became eighth graders.

Next, Dr. Hubbard felt that the filth, graffiti, and dull colors in Mumford made it a terrible place for learning. All of the graffiti and trash had to be removed, the inside walls painted, and the floors cleaned before school started. Structural changes included rewiring the building for computers in the classrooms and for up-to-date science and computer laboratories. The bank used its leverage to side-step the district's construction workers' union. This action enabled repairs that normally took up to 10 years for completion to be finished within a few months. Most requested structural changes were completed before the first day of school. One teacher commented, "The outside of the building is well-kept. The inside of the building is warm and inviting. Now it's like a home" (Brooks, 2005, p. 175).

Dr. Hubbard's experience as a single parent made her sensitive to the fact that most of the children lacked access to medical and dental care, yet their parents were too proud to seek public assistance. Therefore, the principal insisted that a full service clinic be provided for all students, not just for those insured or on public assistance. The clinic had a nurse practitioner who was authorized to diagnose, give shots, and prescribe and administer medications. A partnership was established with a community pharmacy so that school-written prescriptions could be filled at the nurse's request and then be delivered to the school. By ensuring healthier children and a cleaner learning environment, Dr. Hubbard felt that student performance would improve.

Strategies for Partnerships

Controlling Drug Trafficking

Dr. Hubbard's introduction to Mumford's parents was a result of drug transactions on the playground. Dr. Hubbard recalled her unexpected welcome by parents, "This was my very first day. This group of parents came up to me and asked what was I going to do about the drugs? And I said, 'Well, we are going to get rid of them,'" (Brooks, 2005, p. 179). The seasoned principal went into action. "Immediately after that I sent out notices to the parents. I called the parents; I called the police department; I called the stations, and the media, so they could see it," (Brooks, 2005, p. 179).

Although fewer than six parents came to the meeting, police officers, city officials, and the media did come. Not deterred by the minimal presence of parents, Dr. Hubbard sent home flyers asking parents to make complaint telephone calls to city and board officials. She also asked teachers to help during their free time. The principal recounted what occurred:

> We called downtown to the council people. We had just had people from all avenues here. They saw it, and they televised it. It made the headlines, and the drug houses were closed down because of the outcry within a week. (Brooks, 2005, p. 180)

Parents and teachers recalled that over 5,000 telephone calls were made in less than one week, along with daily media coverage televising the playground conditions. This action was the first major step towards reuniting the socially dislocated community to the mainstream. The residents realized that their voices did count. It also informed the principal that parents would support a school that cared about their children.

Facing reality, neither the principal nor the parents believed that the one time raid would stop drug trafficking in the community. So, the principal helped the parents and community members form a partnership with the police department by starting a neighborhood block watch, the first block watch in the city. The parents initiated a parent patrol. The principal helped this group work in conjunction with the police department to provide crossing guards at two busy streets before and after school. This group used members of the community to help children cross other streets, supervise the playground before and after school, and greet visitors entering the building.

As the school's leader, Dr. Hubbard supported parents' efforts by prosecuting trespassers, drug dealers, and people who vandalized school property:

> I let it be known that any trespassers on the school grounds after they had been warned would be arrested. A few tried. So I did have them

arrested. I did follow them to court. I did stand up in court, and the judge would ask me what did I want to do? At that point I would say, if they don't come back, I'm fine. You don't have to do anything, but if they come back I want you to do what you have to do. The word got out. The thing is you have to deal with the fine details. You have to follow through, and you can't make empty threats. So the word is that we protect what we have, and we really value the safety of our children. (Brooks, 2006, p. 487)

By creating the parent patrol and block watch, Dr. Hubbard enabled parents and law enforcers to come together as one. Parents felt that from this alliance, they received quicker responses to police and emergency calls. In essence, the principal's initiation of partnerships between parents and city officials to remove drugs from the school's premises led to the removal of drug houses nearby and made the school cleaner and safer. These collaborative efforts brought non-threatening police visibility into the community, ensured the continuance of justice, and established a connection between the community and the legal side of mainstream society. Children concentrated more on their studies because they knew adults were protecting them. Providing a safer commute to and from school increased student attendance. These changes improved student performances on standardized exams. Hence, the entire city benefited from the unified efforts of the principal, parents, law enforcement, and politicians to protect the children.

The principal also established relationships with area store owners. If a student from Mumford misbehaved in a store, she literally left the school to reprimand the student and make that student apologize to the owner. She instilled in students that whether they were in the building or on the street, they represented Mumford Academy and misbehavior would not be tolerated. As a result of this initiative, businessmen felt more comfortable working in the community and serving neighborhood youth. An alliance was built, eventually leading to the opening of new enterprises in the neighborhood.

Stopping the Violence

Dr. Hubbard used the school to demonstrate to parents and students an alternative to violence for handling disputes. She believed that changes in disciplinary procedures within the school would eventually curb violence in the community. However, to make teachers feel safer during the change, Dr. Hubbard allocated part of her budget toward the training of her staff in self-defense. Most importantly, she created a discipline committee with parents, clergy, teachers, and students as members. They worked with her to determine challenges for teachers and implemented discipline procedures to address them.

Teachers had to follow the procedures, and students had to respect them. The rules and consequences were written in a discipline book.

If an inappropriate act was not listed in the discipline book, the student had to go before the committee. At that time, a consequence was given. The challenge and decision were added to the discipline book in order to provide consistency. Gradually, violence in the school subsided, and the interactions between teachers, parents, and students improved. Over time, as the rules became part of the school's culture, the discipline book was no longer needed. New teachers, students, and parents were informed of these rules during their introduction to school policy by the veterans.

Embracing Parent Advocacy

The parents' positive response to removing drug traffickers confirmed the principal's belief that parents would advocate for their children. She stated, "Parents will gather around a crisis, especially if it affects the safety of their children, if they have someone to lead them, guide them, and help them along the way." Dr. Hubbard informed parents that their voices were respected, expected, and needed to ensure that their children received a quality education.

Dr. Hubbard also felt that to gain respect from teachers and city officials, parents had to learn school protocol. Therefore, she trained the parents in how to advocate effectively on behalf of their children and Mumford before public officials. This training began at the Coffee Sip. The Coffee Sip was an annual event held at the beginning of each school year on a chosen day between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. This time was chosen because it enabled parents to attend prior to beginning their work day. During this event, the school offered free coffee, tea, and donuts to parents while they sat in the auditorium. Parents were entertained and taught effective tactics for gaining social capital in the dominant culture. They learned about telephone campaigns, form letters, and petitions. Parents also learned tactics for addressing the city council and school boards. They selected spokespersons for the entire group and advocates to support them. Also during the Coffee Sip, parents gave testimonials about their advocacy during the previous year. At the end of the meeting, parents were asked to sign up for whatever role they wanted to play in parent advocacy. Parents who could not attend meetings were expected to have other family or community members come in their places. One parent explained how she advocated for the school: "I did write a letter to a couple of the Regents people. I did write to Bivens News. I did write a letter to the Columns; I did address the board," (Brooks, 2005, p. 211).

The rationale behind advocacy training during the Coffee Sip was to instill in parents that in order to improve their children's education, they had to

communicate effectively with policymakers in mainstream society. This lesson proved to be extremely effective on numerous occasions. One parent explained her role as an advocator, "If there's a crisis, I get called because I know a lot of people in Bivens. I've been here from the old school to the new school," (Brooks, 2005, p. 210).

Since the principal and most of her staff did not live in the community, Dr. Hubbard relied upon parents to keep her abreast of community issues needing advocacy on behalf of the children. A parent recalled one of her missions as the school's liaison person:

> If there is something going on in the community and it is vital that the parents know, she'll either call a meeting or she'll send a letter home and let them know what is going on in the community. I am in charge of the parent volunteer group, and we go out and either put flyers out or take letters to the parents' homes. (Brooks, 2005, p. 211)

On one occasion, Mumford's teachers did not receive their paychecks for working in the after-school program. The parents volunteered to advocate on their behalf at a school board meeting. The teachers were disgruntled, but the parents said, "We'll take care of that" (Brooks, 2005, p. 219). As a result, the teachers received their paychecks, and the bond between parents and teachers deepened.

In addition to helping parents learn school protocol, the Coffee Sip was a place for recognition. Dr. Hubbard used the Coffee Sip to thank representatives from the local media, elected officials, and businesses for helping Mumford. The rationale behind this action was to give helpful politicians good press coverage and to change the school and community's images in the general public. Eventually, positive coverage about Mumford was prevalent, while negative portrayals became minimal. Parents who advocated on the school's behalf during the previous year were also congratulated.

Dismantling Unemployment

Dr. Hubbard helped curb unemployment in the African American community. One tactic was to hire parents at the school as teacher aides. She also encouraged parents to get their GEDs and higher. All staff was encouraged to talk to parents about topics unrelated to their children's education. The purpose of these conversations was to help teachers become more comfortable communicating with minorities and to help minority parents become more comfortable talking to persons outside of their community. Next, all faculty members had to volunteer for three school committees or set up programs of their own. Some interested staff members provided educational classes for parents. Parents were also welcome to sit in classes to learn skills their children

were studying, so the parents could help with any homework that their child did not understand. The principal attested that at least six parents returned to school as a direct result of her encouragement and support. Mumford's guidance counselor and a sixth grade teacher at the time of this study were two of these parents. Both continued to live in the surrounding community after receiving their degrees (Brooks, 2005).

The Results of Their Effort

After three years, Dr. Hubbard and the disenfranchised parents finally saw the impact of their hard work. The school's alliance with the media sent positive portrayals of its successes throughout Bivens and its suburbs. The school's image had changed into a school in demand. School violence was practically gone. During the summer of 1997, the enrollment for the upcoming school year increased from a little over 300 students in June to over 600 students with a waiting list by September. As Mumford's reputation continued to improve, so did parents' desires for their children to attend it. Mumford continually keeps an annual waiting list of 300 students.

Mumford's popularity influenced the neighborhood. Since Mumford was designated as a neighborhood school, only students living in its surrounding community could attend it. Therefore, the only way parents could ensure that their children could attend Mumford was to return to the neighborhood. A parent explained this policy's impact upon the area: "There was a time when parents were moving out of the area so fast to keep their kids from going to Mumford. My daughter bought the house across the street so that her kids could go to Mumford."

To aid in a reverse exodus back into this neighborhood, member banks of the Bivens Business Alliance set aside funds for low-income loans to first time homeowners and small businessmen. This gesture enabled parents to purchase the dilapidated rental properties and turn them into residential quarters, as Principal Hubbard described:

> I have a parent that I worked with in the community that had moved out of the area then moved back in the area. She and her husband bought their first home so that their child could go to Mumford. What was hurtful about that is that at the time she did it, her child couldn't get into Mumford because we were at max limit. The next year she got her child in, but she waited. She said that was why they bought their home, and they were going to stay. It's because of the school. She went through our neighborhood housing for first time homeowners. It was one of the houses that they had revamped and sold. She bought it. (Brooks, 2005, p. 234)

After cross-referencing real estate sales for first time homeowners among urban adults in Bivens from 2001 to 2004 to the addresses of Mumford's new students during that same three-year period (Sidney Clanton, personal communication, February 8, 2004), I found that many of Mumford's students lived in the newly purchased homes. Some of the parents purchased the homes while their children were preschoolers in order to ensure acceptance into the school. The real estate sales documents also showed that most new homeowners paid more than the asking price for their homes. One family paid an additional $10,000 for a home in the Mumford community.

Dr. Hubbard stated that professionals were moving back into the area so their children could attend Mumford Academy, "Over these seven years, we've had more parents who are professionals enrolling their children into the building." Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 and 2000 census showed that the area surrounding Mumford Academy was one of few sections of the city that was not only experiencing growth, but growth at a much higher rate than areas growing with similar demographics. Even though the population in the City of Bivens had been dropping over 12,000 people annually since the late 1980s, the population surrounding Mumford had grown. Also apparent was that the number of persons without high school diplomas decreased, while the number of persons with a college education rose.

This education improvement had a positive economic impact upon the community. The New York State Report Card reported a decrease in the number of free and reduced lunches at Mumford. For instance, during the 1998-99 school year, 83% of Mumford's students qualified for free or reduced lunch. By the 2002-03 school year, only 74% of its students qualified. The number of free lunches dropped by 12%, while the number of reduced-price lunches increased by 11%. In 2004, the number of free/reduced qualifiers decreased to 63% (NYSED, 2004). These data suggest that families' incomes were also increasing. By the time of this study, this once socially isolated community was a thriving residential and business area. As stated by one parent:

> The neighborhood surrounding the school is a business community and also a residential neighborhood at the same time. I sit on one of the boards that interact with the businesses and the residents of the area, and we get a lot of things done through our school to help the community. Dr. Hubbard controls over the school and the community just to make sure that the environment is safe for our kids.

The bank's CEO was right. The houses surrounding Mumford are now part of a normal neighborhood. Mumford was televised nationally for its academic achievement and partnership with parents. The changes in this school give evidence that a good school can have a positive impact upon a community.

Discussion

In order to dismantle social dislocation, principals must lead others in the fight for social justice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Although Leithwood and Riehl considered "others" as members of the principals' staff in high poverty, predominantly minority populated urban schools, others must include members of the surrounding community, such as law enforcement and the media. Principals in urban schools must realize that "schools cannot shut their gates and leave the outside world at their doorsteps" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 7). Shutting the gate enables negative external forces, such as crime and drug culture, to have greater influences upon students and school climate than the principals within the buildings do. To counteract the negativity caused by social dislocation, Hargreaves and Fullan suggest that "principals move towards forming new alliances" (p. 105) with parents and other entities outside of the school in their fight for social justice within it. The case presented in this article demonstrates that connecting to the outside community to fight negativity within the school can have a positive ripple effect upon the surrounding community. However, in order to have a positive effect, principals must change their mindset toward school public relations.

Throughout the history of U.S. mainstream public education, school administrators have systematically discouraged input from parents and other individuals whose perceptions of the "melting pot" differed from their own. This discouragement is shown toward European immigrant parents in *Children of the Mill* (Cohen, 2002) and toward minority U.S. parents in Spring's (2007) *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States.* Schools typically isolate themselves from the communities they serve. However, with the U.S. population becoming more diverse and the manifestation of violence in schools escalating, administrators must solicit alliances with the public in order address the social ills that have impacted education. Schools cannot continue to work in a vacuum when attempting to solve problems. One model for reaching out to the community is found in the Traditional African American Schools (TAAS). By adopting a mindset that changes previous practices of ignoring parents to exploring new solutions, principals could "base risk on security" (Hargreaves & Fullan, p. 105). Giving value to parents' perceptions and experiences is a start.

Moving Towards Alliances with Local Businesses and Organizations

In the past, TAAS were totally dependent upon the African American community to provide needed resources. However, due to declining property taxes

and high unemployment in socially isolated communities, a better way to attack social injustice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) and inequity in school funding is to form alliances with mainstream businesses, service agencies, and social organizations. These commitments can be monetary or service oriented, such as setting up a clinic or dental students providing oral care for children. In this case study, one bank committed $500,000 annually for eight years, another company rewarded its employees for serving as mentors to students, another company volunteered to beautify the grounds, while others committed to giving loans to first time homeowners. Before soliciting businesses or service agencies, the principal first determined the school's needs and the time commitment required. Once determined, the principal matched the need to possible organizations that could help. She stated that the alliances did not always work out, so she continued soliciting partners until the alliances worked. Alliances with businesses and service organizations served multiple purposes: they provided access to resources formerly unavailable; they made an unnoticed community become visible to the general public; they exposed students and their parents to opportunities outside their neighborhoods; and they instilled pride in ownership as the school excelled and renters became homeowners.

Moving Towards Alliances with Parents

In the case of building alliances with African American parents in socially isolated communities, school administrators must understand the basic difference between White middle-class parents' and African American parents' perceptions of rights. Middle-class White parents believe their children have a fundamental right to a good education, so they demand it. Therefore, scholars such as Marzano (2003) and Hoy and Miskel (2008) forewarned principals to protect their schools from external special interest groups and parents whose goals may have a negative impact upon the schools' organizational health. On the other hand, Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) believe that principals should "respect those you want to silence" (p. 105); this is especially true in regards to African American parents.

Before silencing African American parents, principals must understand that these parents' perceptions of rights are often contrary to those of White parents. African American parents WANT their children to have a good education; they WANT to demand it. Research by Gay (2000) found that African American parents who live in socially isolated communities are less likely to know the proper manner in which to voice their concerns to school personnel. Prior to advocating to the principal, African American parents weigh the consequences. Once they consider the consequence of humiliation for voicing their children's needs, they often choose to remain silent. This silence often alienates an entire population from school leadership.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggested that by listening to the concerns of minority parents and using their input to understand the historical and contextual significance of the schools' dynamics, principals learn about internal and external practices that impede student learning and parent involvement. Ignoring the voices of minority parents allows the continuation of false security with unhealthy school climates based upon illusions of good school culture. By listening and acting, principals can create a healthy school climate for all of their students.

Principals must also be sincere in their efforts to end asymmetrical relationships with parents and to end injustices within their buildings. To do this, Hargreaves and Fullan's study (1998) found that principals must manage people emotionally as well as rationally. When forming alliances with African American parents, managing emotionally means changing the school's norms, values, and relationships to include people whose views may differ from their own. However, principals must also manage rationally. According to Hargreaves and Fullan, managing rationally means principals must express how they feel about issues, ask for help when unsure of what to do, and empathize with others who do not share their own viewpoints. They must convince parents that they sincerely want to form a more egalitarian alliance with them that leads to positive results. There were several practices the principal in this study incorporated into her schools' culture to change power relationships into alliances with minority parents. One practice was initiating forums that taught school protocol and enabled two-way conversations between the principal and parents in non-threatening atmospheres. These forums helped the school administrator realize that parents' understanding of the system affects their behavior towards it (Shujaa, 1996).

The other important part of this conversation came from parents. The principal encouraged parents to explain their expectations for their children's education, how they could be involved, and concerns about practices that endangered their children. Both parties came away from these forums with a better understanding of how to work with each other to enhance student learning and a common commitment to end social injustice as a team. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggested that both groups agree to "fight for lost causes (being hopeful when it counts)" (p. 105). In the case school, the first lost cause was to rid the school of drug dealers and traffickers. This concern was put on the table the first day of school. Not only were both parties concerned about getting rid of drug trafficking on school grounds, but making sure that it did not return. This united effort conquered the lost cause and set a collaborative tone for the remainder of the year.

A second united effort was the appointment of parent liaisons. Parent liaisons informed the principal of events or changes in the community that had the potential to interfere with student learning and/or safety. In the case school, these events included destruction of school property, school participation in a city-wide program, or preventing the establishment of a drug treatment center on a street in the children's path to school. Since most teachers and principals did not live in the community, a parent liaison provided awareness of negatively influential outside occurrences that could interfere with student learning within the building. By changing the mindset for relationships, the school increased student safety, which helped parents perceive school personnel as caring.

Another practice which shows that the administrator cared was enabling African American parents to advocate against perceived social injustices. In TAAS, parents were expected to advocate against unfair practices. African American parents advocating against social injustice should not be confused with feelings of privilege or unearned entitlement. Parent advocacy means parents' reports of perceived discriminatory practices within a school that they believe are hindering their children's abilities to learn. Dismissing such concerns without investigation can turn children off to education for the rest of their K-12 experiences.

The principal's efforts to educate parents were not in vain. Parents became successful in advocating before board and city officials on the school's behalf. When the parents and school personnel worked together against injustices, both groups found that the board of education, city officials, and local state representatives responded positively. This newfound empowerment gave parents courage to align themselves with other officials to fight against negative forces in the community and to seek opportunities outside of their community.

Moving Towards Alliances with Law Enforcement and City Officials

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) stated that schools should not be socially isolated; they need to connect to the community. Today, more principals and parents realize that forming alliances with local and state elected officials, law enforcement, and the judicial system are necessities in order to conquer negative external influences that interfere with schools' daily functions. These alliances were unheard of in mainstream or TAAS public schools during the early part of the twentieth century. Today, these alliances help principals and school disciplinary committees plan preventive measures for deterring misbehavior within their buildings, as well as blocking the infiltration of negative outside influences into the school. They also enable principals to have input into the types of consequences used by law enforcers against violators at their schools. This was

exemplified when the principal worked out a punishment system with the city's judges for trespassers. Enabling the community to have input on the type of consequences rendered for particular crimes helped residents develop a sense of trust in law enforcement to make a fair judgment. As a result, the community block watch was the first of its kind in the city. In the case presented, parents felt that their alliance with police reduced misunderstandings and crime. In essence, four-way alliances (principal, parents, law enforcers, and community leaders) made members of a socially isolated community form a positive relationship with law enforcement, ending a legacy of distrust.

Making Alliances with the Media

Normally school administrators are fearful of the media because reporters are often quick in conveying negative school events before gathering data from principals. Alliances make the media more sensitive about reporting any negative publicity without first communicating with the administrtors. This alliance gives principals a better chance of having good news reported and having greater input into what and how negative incidents regarding the school are reported. Principals need to partner with the media to expose the school's accomplishments, whether big or small, to publicize disparities due to lack of resources, and to overpower the impact of negative external forces upon learning. Therefore, it behooves principals to form alliances with the media. Seeking alliances with such an influential sector of the community gives principals the opportunity to improve the school and its surrounding community's image in the mainstream.

In summary, principals working in socially dislocated communities cannot ignore outside forces, but must build alliances with them in order to ensure student success. This study demonstrates that alliances between schools, businesses, social organizations, parents, lawmakers, and the media can rebuild a community. However, none of the groups can achieve this rebuilding working in isolation. The uniting element in battling social injustice in this case was the school principal.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Schools' partnering with communities and businesses is an important, necessary change strategy when working in socially isolated areas. This case study clearly illustrates that school leaders can make significant improvements in minority urban children's education and in their communities by adopting proactive strategies that address issues that impede education. School leaders also need to be proactive about marketing the good aspects of their schools.

Leaders must also be determined to reduce negative press releases by building positive relationships with reporters. None of these tasks can be accomplished without alliances with external sources. When principals make alliances with the positive external community forces to help overcome the negative forces within, they find that it rebuilds a community as well as the school.

School leaders must prepare in order to build alliances with any community of marginalized people, whether in impoverished urban or rural communities. Understanding of how the people normally address or overcome challenges is needed before leaders can develop effective tools for resolving issues. Therefore, professors should encourage future principals not to be afraid of parental involvement, but to welcome diverse viewpoints and empower their communities. Principals need to exhibit sensitivity to the uniqueness of their schools' constituents and to reach beyond just the immediate community through cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, awareness, knowledge, and skills. Hence, when developing future school leaders, instructors should encourage them to be less hierarchical in their thinking and more expansive in their approach to building partnerships with parents and their community. Just as the teenager in *Back to the Future* had to learn from the past how to come to terms with his present, the Traditional African American School offers insight into how principals today can and should empower their communities.

Endnotes

[1]This article focuses on middle-class Black flight as it pertains to Wilson's theory of social dislocation. White flight is not discussed because the situation around it in this city/area is unique and requires an entire article in its own right. There are books and articles on this complex situation, including works by Taylor & Jacobson.

[2]According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Blacks are 4 times more likely to live in poverty areas than not; 1 in 3 lives in poverty, while 1 in 25 lives in extreme poverty.

[3]Quotes were all gathered as described in the Methods section; those also cited in previous publications are cited as such within this article.

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Sharon M. Brooks is an assistant professor at Georgia Southern University in the Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development. She specializes in school-community relationships, diversity and ethics, and instructional supervision. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Sharon M. Brooks, Georgia Southern University, Leadership, Technology and Human Development, P. O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA, 30460.

Parental Involvement in Primary Children's Homework in Hong Kong

Vicky C. Tam and Raymond M. Chan

Abstract

This study draws upon an ecological perspective to examine parental involvement in homework and its relationship with primary school children's educational outcomes within the Chinese sociocultural context of Hong Kong. Data were collected using homework diaries and questionnaires administered to 1,309 pairs of students and parents spanning all six primary grade levels in 36 primary schools in Hong Kong. Results show that primary children across grade levels devote a substantial amount of time each day after school to homework assignments and revision, while parents' involvement in the homework process varies. Such variation in parental involvement is found to relate to the child's grade level as well as the parent's educational attainment. Gain in children's academic efficacy with higher parental involvement level is observed among junior primary students as well as those with parents of lower educational attainment. Implications for the school's role in involving parents in the homework process are discussed.

Key Words: parental involvement, homework, primary school, Hong Kong, survey research, academic achievement, elementary students, Chinese families

Introduction

Homework is a significant part of students' learning experience across educational systems around the world. It involves tasks assigned to students by

school teachers that are intended to be carried out outside the school (Cooper, 2001), including written and non-written assignments, as well as preparation for tests and examinations. Potential academic benefits are expected from doing homework: retention and understanding of materials, and improving study skills and attitudes towards school. As homework assignments are completed at home, these learning tasks offer opportunities for involving parents in the learning process and enhancing their appreciation of education (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). In such regard, homework brings forth the potential development of home-school partnerships (Epstein, 2002).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective (1979, 1986, 1992) offers an appropriate framework for understanding the role of homework in enhancing home-school collaboration. This perspective emphasizes the progressive, mutual accommodation between the person and his/her immediate and larger environments. It has been used in examining parental involvement in education and generating practice implications and new research questions (Seginer, 2006). From an ecological perspective, parents' participation in the homework process constitutes part of the mesosystem that bridges the two microsystems of family and school in their simultaneous effort to facilitate children's academic development. Furthermore, an ecological perspective recognizes the influence of cultural norms and ideological values, the constituent components of a macrosystem, on homework involvement among students and parents.

Homework and Parental Involvement Among Chinese Families

This study examines parental involvement in homework in the ecological context of Chinese families in Hong Kong. It has been well documented that Chinese culture regards education as the most effective avenue to social and economic advancement and the improvement of the person (Salili, Zhou, & Hoosain, 2003; Stevenson & Lee, 1996). Chinese school children in general face heavy pressure on academic achievement. Homework, comprised of mainly drilling and practice, is considered a crucial tool for facilitating and consolidating learning. It is thus not surprising to find that Chinese parents in Hong Kong support the use of homework as a learning strategy (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Cooperation, 1994). Chen and Stevenson's (1989) cross-cultural study find homework to be the primary out-of-school activity for Chinese children in Beijing and Taiwan, and these children devote long hours each day to their schoolwork. Furthermore, compared to Japanese and American counterparts, Chinese elementary schoolchildren perceive homework to be important, useful, and enjoyable. Other studies also demonstrate that the good academic performance among Chinese students is often attributed to their intensive effort on homework (Dandy & Nettlebeck, 2002; Stevenson & Lee, 1996).

To support the importance of education, Chinese parents usually offer help with homework by providing tutorial assistance to their children as well as monitoring the homework process. This practice also serves to highlight the virtues of hard work and to reinforce the importance of effort (Stevenson & Lee, 1996). Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, and Ching's (1997) study on mathematics learning showed Chinese-American parents spend more time on homework, structure their child's time to a greater degree, and show more encouragement for mathematics-related activities than do their Euro-American counterparts. Furthermore, involvement in homework is often considered a preferred form of home-school collaboration among Chinese parents. Ho's (2003) study on primary and secondary school students in Hong Kong showed that home-based parental involvement, especially learning support, is more popular than school-based involvement. This preference is related to the cultural tendency to maintain a relatively sharp differentiation between the functions of school and home. It is also the result of a short history of school-based parental involvement in Hong Kong, where public policy acknowledging its importance was set up only in the early 1990s (Ng, 1999).

Parental Involvement in Homework and Children's Intellectual Development

A substantial volume of research has accumulated on parental involvement in education, covering various domains of related parenting practices (see reviews in Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Seginer, 2006). Among them, a modest proportion focuses on homework involvement. Review of research on parental involvement in homework confirms its relationships to positive student attitude about homework and school learning, students' self-perceptions, and effective student work habits and self-regulation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Yet, studies on homework's impact on student achievement often fail to show positive results. It has been shown that the time parents spent helping their children with homework is unrelated to children's academic performance (Chen & Stevenson, 1996; Pezdek, Berry, & Renno, 2002). Reviews of research findings (Cooper, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001) report mixed results and conclude that no simple relationship can be drawn between parents' homework involvement and student achievement. In order to develop a consolidated understanding of the contribution of parental involvement in homework, future research should focus on at least three methodological and conceptual concerns, namely measurement, developmental difference, and social class variations.

Measurement Issues

First, issues pertaining to research design and measurement may explain the inconclusive results on benefits of parental involvement in homework. It is observed that the operational use of the construct "parental involvement in education" has not been clear and consistent across studies (Fan & Chen, 2001). While parental involvement is multifaceted in nature, certain dimensions of parental involvement (such as parents' educational aspiration for their children) may have more noticeable effect than some other dimensions (such as volunteering) on students' academic achievement (Fan, 2001). Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2001) research review shows that investigators have seldom defined homework involvement in clearly comparable ways, reflecting the wide range of strategies and behaviors parents employed in helping children regarding homework. Research should thus tap into the multifaceted nature of parental involvement in homework.

Time spent on supervising and assisting children with homework is a crucial indicator of parental involvement as it provides a direct measure of the extent of parent's participation. Yet it is often neglected in parenting research. In those few instances in which it is adopted, only an estimate, but not actual time spent, is measured (e.g., Chen & Stevenson, 1989). In view of its potential in informing parenting practices, it is worthwhile to include this indicator in research design.

Research on homework involvement should also include a variety of behaviors and strategies used by parents in helping children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Grolnick and Ryan (1989) suggest a typology of three categories, namely autonomy support, direct involvement, and provision of structure. Autonomy support refers to the extent to which parents value and use techniques that encourage in their children independent problem solving, choice, and participation in homework decisions. Direct involvement is the extent to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and take an active part in their children's homework. Provision of structure pertains to the degree to which parents provide clear and consistent guidelines and follow through on contingencies for their children's homework. Results of Grolnick and Ryan's (1989) study on elementary schoolchildren show that the three types of behaviors relate differentially to development outcomes. Specifically, autonomy support is related to autonomous self-regulation, while direct involvement and provision of structure are associated with school achievement and control perception, respectively. Research should thus include multiple dimensions of child outcomes in order to examine in depth the multifaceted impact of parents' homework involvement.

Developmental Difference

A number of research studies have reported on changes in parental involvement in homework in relation to children's age and grade level. Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) find that parents of high school students report more autonomy training and less direct involvement than those at the elementary school level. A study conducted by Worrell, Gabelko, Roth, and Samuels (1999) shows that the amount of assistance that parents provide decreases even though the amount of homework increases through the elementary school grades. Seginer's (2006) review of studies on parental involvement in education found that home-based behaviors shift from facilitating school learning skills in preschool and kindergarten to helping with and checking homework in elementary school to motivational support (e.g., monitoring school progress, communicating with child on school matters) in junior and senior high school. This pool of evidence illustrates how parents make use of developmentally specific strategies in engaging in children's education. Parenting practices are thus likely to result in differentiated impact on student achievement at different grade levels (Cooper, 2001). This argument is supported by Jeynes's (2007) research review on the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement, which shows that primary school studies have higher effect size than studies on high schools. Research on the impact of parental involvement in homework should thus focus on grade level as a factor.

Social Class Variations

The last issue to consider for parental involvement research is social class. It has been pointed out that inconsistencies in linking parent involvement to academic achievement are related to the failure of studies to fully assess differential effects by socioeconomic status (Domina, 2005; McNeal, 1999). Evidence collected in Hong Kong and other parts of the world finds that parental involvement in education often relates to the socioeconomic background of the family (Ho, 2000, 2002; Lareau, 1987). Middle-class parents in possession of cultural and social capital help children with homework more readily than their working-class counterparts. McNeal's (1999) analysis of high school students in the U.S. shows that parental involvement has great effects on academic achievement for more affluent students, as the effects are magnified through the greater level of cultural capital possessed by members of the upper class. Yet, Domina's (2005) study on U.S. elementary school children reports the opposite: involvement of parents of lower socioeconomic status (SES) may be more effective in promoting children's achievement than that of parents of high SES. In view of the contradictory findings, it is of interest to find out how the factor of socioeconomic status influences the impact of parental involvement on children's educational outcomes among Chinese families in Hong Kong.

Research Scope and Objectives

This study contributes to the wealth of research on parental involvement in homework by examining Chinese families with school-age children in Hong Kong. The competitive nature of the achievement-oriented education system in Hong Kong reinforces the importance of homework and parental involvement, thus rendering it a remarkable ecological setting for research on the topic. The target of this study is on primary school students, as children in the lower grades are generally more influenced by parental values and parents are generally more involved with them (Jeynes, 2007). To examine the differential impact of multifaceted parental involvement dimensions, a host of three educational outcomes – including interest in academic subjects, academic efficacy, as well as efficacy belief on self-regulation – are examined. Furthermore, this study examines the factors of grade level and family socioeconomic status in affecting parental involvement in homework and its impact on educational outcomes.

Method

Sample

This study is part of a large-scale research project on homework involvement among primary school students in Hong Kong. Data for the project were collected from students, parents, and teachers in 36 primary schools using multistage sampling (McBurney, 2001) that involved stratified and cluster sampling strategies. First, a stratified random sample of schools with reference to funding mode (public and private) and geographical region (urban and new town) was drawn from a master list of primary schools in Hong Kong. Invitation letters were sent to the principals to seek the schools' participation. A total of 71 schools were approached; 36 consented to take part in the study. The overall participation rate for schools was 50.7%. The final sample of schools was representative of the territory-wide profile in terms of funding mode and geographical region. At the second stage of sampling, cluster samples were drawn in each participating school using intact classes as sampling units. Specifically, one class each at junior primary (P1 to P3) and senior primary (P4 to P6) levels was randomly selected from each participating school to take part in this project.

Data for this study were collected using questionnaires administered to a total of 2,442 students from 72 classes in these 36 schools, with a response rate of 98.1%. These students also completed a homework diary that recorded homework-related information for three schools days. In addition, their parents filled in a self-administered questionnaire on their involvement in the

homework process. Homework diaries and parent questionnaires were completed at home and returned to the research team via postal mail. Eventually, 1,398 pairs of students and their parents responded, constituting 57.25% of the student sample. After discarding invalid returns, the final sample for this study comprised 1,309 pairs of students and their parents representing all six primary grade levels. Among them, there were 650 boys (49.7%) and 659 girls (50.3%), whereas there were 319 fathers (24.4%) and 990 mothers (75.6%). The mean ages of the students and their parents were 9.88 years (*SD* = 1.75), and 40.92 years (*SD* = 5.91), respectively.

Measures

Data for this study were collected using a homework diary and two sets of questionnaires designed separately for students and parents. Each set comprised a host of measurement scales that assessed specific constructs included in the study. Demographic information – including age, gender, grade level, and parent's education attainment as an indicator of family socioeconomic status – was included in the respective questionnaires.

Parental Involvement in Homework

Information on time spent each day by parents supervising and helping with their children's homework assignments and revisions were recorded in the homework diary for three school days. As high incidence of missing data were reported for the third day of diary data collection, data used in this analysis were drawn from figures averaged over the first two days only. Corresponding figures for student involvement in homework were collected in the diary.

Parental Involvement Behavior

The three dimensions of parental behaviors in homework involvement, namely autonomy support, direct involvement, and provision of structure, were measured using parent-report items constructed for the purpose of this study (see Appendix for details on the instruments). Principal Component Factor analysis with varimax rotation performed on the 10 items of parental involvement behaviors resulted in three factors with eigen values greater than 1, together explaining 54.04% variance. Scree plot also supported a 3-factor solution. The solution on the whole confirmed the structure of the self-constructed instrument. Using factor loading of .5 as a criterion, Factor 1 consisted of the three items on provision of structure, Factor 2 comprised the four items on direct instruction, and Factor 3 consisted of the two items on support for autonomy. Only one item, "We demand our child to finish homework within a designated time," which was designed for the subscale of provision of structure, failed to reach the factor loading criterion across all three factors identified.

Academic Outcomes

Three indicators of academic outcomes, namely interest in academic subjects, academic efficacy, and efficacy for self-regulated learning, were included in this study to assess students' learning performance. They were measured using student-report scales (see Appendix for details on the instruments). The first one was Academic Interest Scale, which was constructed for the purpose of this study. Each of its four self-report scale items measured student's interest in one specific academic subject including Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, and General Studies. The second indicator, academic efficacy, was assessed using a self-report scale that measured student's belief in his/her capability in managing four academic subjects. The third indicator tapped efficacy for self-regulated learning using a scale adapted from Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996). It measured students' belief in their ability to organize and manage learning by themselves. It has been used previously with a research study on primary school students in Hong Kong (Tam & Lam, 2003).

Results

This section reports findings on parental involvement in homework among Hong Kong Chinese families in Hong Kong. First, descriptive statistics on time spent on homework by parents are presented. Associations between parental involvement level and two demographic factors, namely grade level and family socioeconomic status, are examined. Grade-level analysis is conducted by splitting the sample into the junior primary (P1 to P3; $n = 623$) and senior primary (P4 to P6; $n = 686$) levels. Family socioeconomic status is indicated by parent's highest education attainment, with 208 parents attaining "primary school or below" and 1,076 attaining "secondary school or above". The second part of this section investigates relationships between parental involvement and student's academic outcomes using correlation analysis and multivariate analysis of variance.

Parental Involvement in Homework

Results showed that primary school students in Hong Kong were given an average of 5.98 ($SD = 2.51$) pieces of homework assignments each school day, and they spent 170.89 minutes ($SD = 100.47$) completing these assignments and doing revision. The mean time spent on homework for junior primary and senior primary students was 178.50 minutes ($SD = 108.08$) and 163.98 minutes ($SD = 92.55$), respectively. Only eight students in the entire sample reported

spending no time at all on homework in the two days of data collection. Correspondingly, parents spent a mean of 36.98 minutes (*SD* = 45.85) each day assisting and supervising children's homework. The corresponding figures for parents of junior and senior primary students were 49.88 minutes (*SD* = 47.83) and 25.24 (*SD* = 40.60), respectively. Independent-sample t-tests comparing homework involvement between senior primary and junior primary students showed significant grade-level differences. Specifically, junior primary students and their parents spent more time on homework than their senior primary counterparts, $t(1307)$s = 2.62 and 10.07, ps < .01, respectively.

Analysis on parental involvement proceeded with two considerations. First, the large values of standard deviation indicated that the amount of homework assigned to and the amount of time spent on homework assignments and revisions varied tremendously across individual students. It was deemed appropriate to factor this information into the assessment of parental involvement. Hence, an indicator of parental involvement ratio was compiled by dividing parent's time spent on homework by their child's. Second, a large variance with parents' time spent on homework was observed as 34.7% of the sampled parents reportedly did not spend any time at all on children's homework. Given this non-normal distribution of parental time involvement, a tripartite split on the sample was conducted using the median value of parental involvement ratio (.29). As a result, three parental involvement level groups were generated. Specifically, the group "no involvement" consisted of cases reporting no parental involvement (parental involvement ratio = 0; n = 447); the second group "low involvement" comprised cases with below median parental involvement (parental involvement ratio ≤ .29; n = 423); and the group "high involvement" included cases with above median parental involvement in homework (parental involvement ratio > .29; n = 431). Frequency distributions across parental involvement level, grade level, and parent's education attainment are presented in Table 1. Result of Chi-square test showed significant association between parental involvement level and grade level, $\chi^2(2)$ = 136.29, p < .01. Specifically, parents of junior primary school students were more likely to exhibit high involvement in homework and less likely to be uninvolved than those of senior primary students. A second chi-square test was conducted between parental involvement level and parent's education attainment. The association was also significant, with $\chi^2(2)$ = 20.51, p < .01. Parents with primary-school education or below were more likely to be uninvolved than those with education attainment at secondary school level or above.

Table 1. Frequency Table on Parental Involvement Level, Parent's Education Attainment, and Grade Level

Grade level	Parent's education attainment	Parental involvement level (f)					
		No		Low		High	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Junior primary	Primary school or below	28	6.33%	30	7.21%	38	8.92%
	Secondary school or above	94	21.27%	173	41.59%	247	57.98%
Senior primary	Primary school or below	72	16.29%	24	5.77%	16	3.76%
	Secondary school or above	248	56.11%	189	45.43%	125	29.34%
Total		442	100.00%	416	100.00%	426	100.00%

Note. Sample size for this analysis was 1,284 as missing data were reported with parent's education attainment. Percentages are column percentages.

Results on parental involvement behaviors (see Table 2) showed that parents generally reported high levels of autonomy support (M = 2.43, SD = 0.59) and moderate levels of direct involvement (M = 1.91, SD = 0.59) and provision of structure (M = 2.13, SD = 0.58). Intercorrelations among the three types of parental involvement behavior were mostly significant with moderate values of Pearsons' rs ranging from -.02 to .50. Hence, multivariate analysis of variance test was employed to compare parental involvement behaviors across the two independent variables of parental involvement level and grade level. Significant main effects were reported with both independent variables, with Wilks' lambda at .89 for parental involvement level and .97 for grade level, $F(6, 2574)$ = 25.96 and $F(3, 1287)$ = 15.56 , ps < .01. There was no significant interaction effect between the two independent variables. Univariate tests showed significant parental involvement difference in direct involvement and provision of structure, $F(2, 1289)$s = 77.57 and 18.34, ps < .01, but no difference in autonomy support. Post-hoc comparisons demonstrated that high-involvement parents exhibited higher direct involvement and provision of structure than the other two groups. In turn, low-involvement parents also performed better in these two involvement behaviors than their uninvolved counterparts. Significant grade-level difference was reported with direct involvement only, $F(1, 1289)$ = 44.83, p < .01, but not with autonomy support or provision of structure. Parents of junior primary students exhibited higher levels of direct involvement than those of senior primary students.

Table 2. Means of Parental Involvement Behavior Scores by Parental Involvement Level and Grade Level

Parental involvement behavior	Grade level	Parental involvement level			All
		No	Low	High	
		M	*M*	*M*	*M*
Autonomy support	Junior primary	2.45	2.41	2.42	2.42
	Senior primary	2.41	2.48	2.41	2.43
	All	2.42	2.45	2.42	2.43
Direct involvement	Junior primary	1.82	2.03	2.25	2.09
	Senior primary	1.55	1.81	2.11	1.75
	All	1.62	1.92	2.20	1.91
Provision of structure	Junior primary	2.12	2.17	2.24	2.19
	Senior primary	1.93	2.14	2.32	2.08
	All	1.98	2.16	2.26	2.13

Relating Parental Involvement to Academic Outcomes

The second part of the analysis attempted to explore the relationships between parental involvement and academic outcomes. Bivariate correlations between parental involvement behavior variables and academic outcomes computed separately for junior and senior primary students showed only a few significant results. Among junior primary students, only two significant correlations were reported, namely between provision of structure and academic subject efficacy ($r = .11$, $p < .01$) and between provision of structure and efficacy for self-regulated learning ($r = .09$, $p < .05$). Only one significant correlation was reported among senior primary students, namely between autonomy support and academic subject efficacy ($r = .13$, $p < .01$). Intercorrelations between the three academic outcome variables were found to be significant, with values of Pearsons' r ranging from .38 to .62, all ps < .01.

In view of the moderate correlations among the outcome variables, multivariate analysis of variance test was employed to compare differences in academic outcomes across parental involvement level. Given the earlier findings that parental involvement level was associated with parent's education attainment and grade level, a three-way multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to include these two demographic characteristics as additional independent variables and to examine possible interactions. A fractional factorial model was tested, focusing on the main effect of parental involvement (PI), two-way interactions between involvement and grade level (PI x GL) and between involvement and parent's education attainment (PI x PEA), and their three-way interaction (PI x PEA x GL). Pillai's trace was used for this MANOVA as there were unequal group sizes with parent's education attainment.

MANOVA results showed no significant main effect nor three-way interaction effect, whereas both two-way interaction effects included in the model were significant, Pillai's trace of .01 for PI x PEA, $F(9, 3813) = 2.03$, $p < .05$, and .05 for PI x GL, $F(9, 3813) = 7.36$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc univariate tests on the significant interactions showed significant PI x PEA interaction with academic efficacy only, $F(3, 1271) = 3.96$, $p < .01$, whereas PI x GL interactions were significant across all three academic outcome indicators, $F(3, 1271)s = 20.39$, 7.84, and 6.78 for academic interest, academic efficacy, and self-regulated efficacy, respectively, $ps < .01$.

Tests for simple main effects using Bonferroni adjustments were conducted on these four significant interactions to examine parental involvement differences on academic outcomes within specific groups of grade level and parent's education attainment (see Table 3). Results showed that for the significant PI x PEA interaction, significant parental involvement differences in academic efficacy were reported among students with parents attaining primary education, $F(2, 1271) = 5.38$, $p < .01$, but not among those with higher-educated parents. Among students of parents attaining primary level schooling, pairwise comparisons showed significant parental involvement difference in academic efficacy only between students of uninvolved parents ($M = 2.61$) and those of high-involvement parents ($M = 3.12$). Similar results were reported with academic efficacy with regard to the significant PI x GL interactions. Significant parental involvement differences in academic efficacy were reported for junior primary students, $F(2, 1271) = 6.01$, $p < .01$, but not for their senior primary counterparts. Among junior primary students, pairwise comparisons showed significant difference in academic efficacy between students of uninvolved parents ($M = 2.87$) and those of high-involvement parents ($M = 3.06$) and between children of involved parents and those of low-involvement parents ($M = 3.09$). Charts plotting interactions with significant pairwise comparisons are presented in Figures 1 and 2. No significant results were reported for other simple main effects reported with PI x GL interactions on interest in academic subjects and efficacy for self-regulated learning.

Table 3. Simple Main Effects Tests on Significant Interactions with Bonferroni Adjustments

Variable		Parental involvement level			
		No	Low	High	*F*
		M	*M*	*M*	
Parent's education attainment					
Academic efficacy	Primary school or below	2.61	2.86	3.12	5.38**
	Secondary school or above	2.85	2.93	2.92	1.17
Grade level					
Interest in academic subjects	Junior primary	4.08	4.24	4.19	1.06
	Senior primary	3.73	3.81	3.81	0.43
Academic efficacy	Junior primary	2.68	3.01	3.23	6.01**
	Senior primary	2.58	2.68	2.84	0.26
Efficacy for self-regulated learning	Junior primary	2.70	2.85	2.97	2.28
	Senior primary	2.34	2.48	2.63	1.39

Note. *df* = 2, 1271.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01

Figure 1. Interaction effect of parental involvement level and parent's education attainment on academic efficacy.
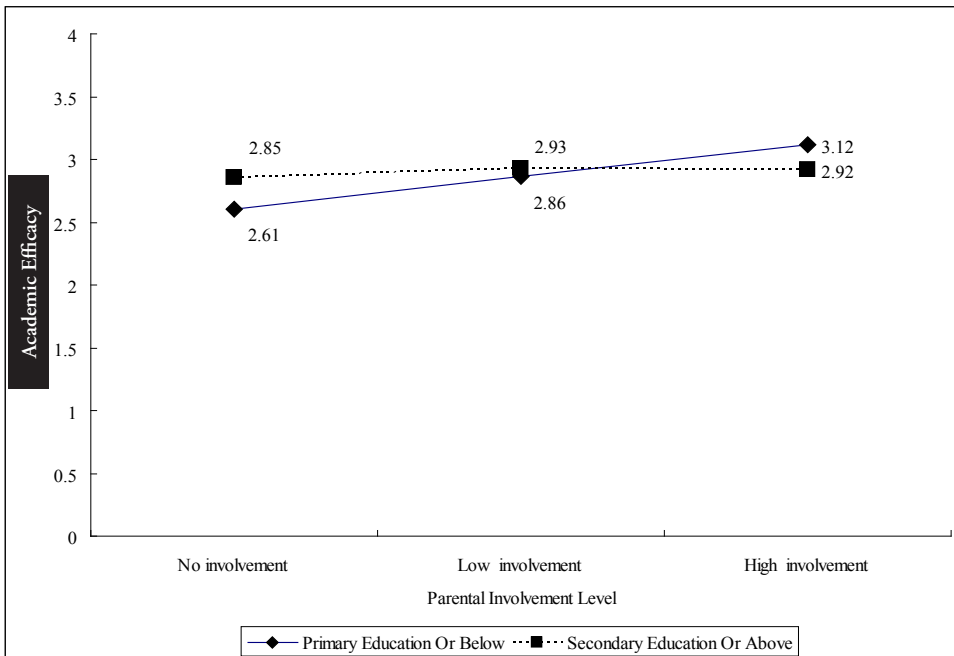
Figure 2. Interaction effect of parental involvement and grade level interaction on academic efficacy.
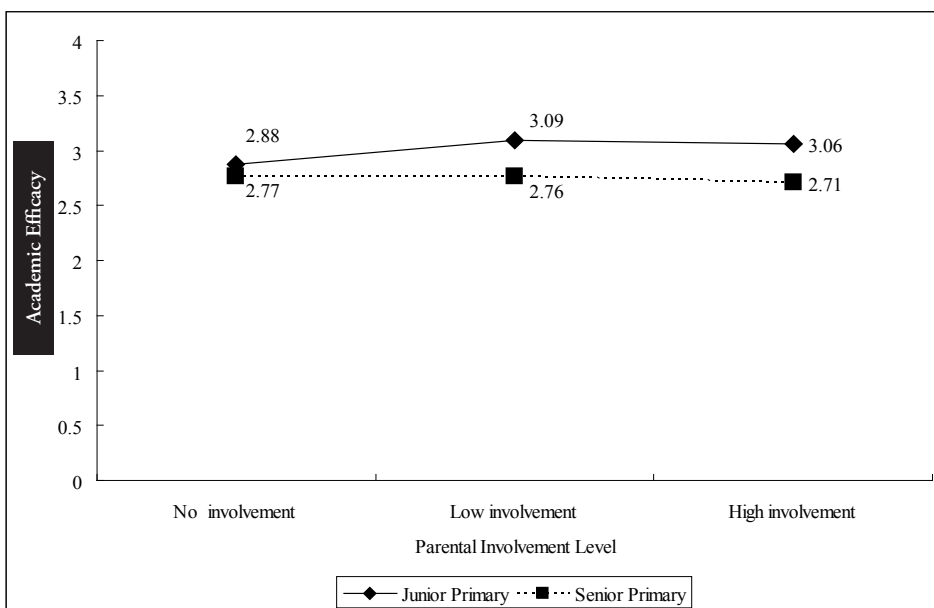
Discussion

This study draws upon an ecological perspective to examine parental involvement in homework and its relationship with children's educational outcomes within the sociocultural context of Hong Kong. Findings provide a profile of Chinese parents' participation in their school-age children's homework process and examine the link between parental involvement and children's academic development. This study carries unique contributions to research on parental involvement by examining a host of parental involvement dimensions and by collecting information from both children and parents.

Profile of Parental Involvement

Results of this study show that primary school students in Hong Kong across grade levels devote a substantial amount of time each day after school in homework assignments and revision. This shows the persistence of strong Chinese cultural and societal values on education and the importance of effort. To support their children's education, Chinese parents in Hong Kong in general commit considerable time to supervising their children's homework. Yet, there is a large variation in time spent by parents, as around one-third of the parents

report non-involvement. Within the Hong Kong context that emphasizes education, it would be worthwhile to find out why certain parents are uninvolved with their children's homework.

Analyses from this study show marked differentiation among parents with regard to direct involvement and provision of structure but not autonomy support. Specifically, regardless of their time spent on children's homework, parents almost unanimously support the significance of developing children's independence in the homework process, endorsing it as a goal for children as they mature and progress with educational development. The lower level of provision of structure among uninvolved parents reflects their failure to set up guidelines and scaffolding for their children's learning. Furthermore, results of this study show that these uninvolved parents are more likely to have older children as well as to have lower education attainment themselves. On one hand, parental non-involvement is rendered a developmentally appropriate strategy as children advance in grade level. On the other hand, the lack of direct involvement in homework and the failure to provide guidelines and structure among less-educated parents reflects the poverty of cultural capital they bring into the parenting context. Findings of this study thus render support to existing literature on the link between socioeconomic status and parental involvement in education (Ho, 2002; Lareau, 1987).

Parental Involvement and Educational Outcomes

Results of this study show that the benefit of parents' homework involvement varies according to the child's grade level and the family's social class. First, among junior primary students, parents' provision of guidelines and structure is related to children's efficacy beliefs in academic performance as well as in self-regulated learning. For the senior primary students, parents' support of independence and autonomy in homework process is associated with academic efficacy. Similar developmental variation is observed with parental involvement level and its relations to educational outcomes. Gains in academic efficacy are observed among junior primary students with parents who spend time in the homework process when compared to those with uninvolved parents, whereas no similar gain is reported for senior primary students. The more obvious gain in educational outcome incurred by parental involvement in homework among Chinese junior primary students in Hong Kong provides support to results of previous studies demonstrating age-differentiated impacts of parental participation (Jeynes, 2007). Given the heavy homework pressure among Hong Kong students, children of younger ages rely more on their parents' emotional and practical support. In such regard, assistance rendered by parents is more likely to be effective in cultivating young children's learning motivation and

efficacy beliefs. As children advance in grade level, their reliance on parents diminishes as the learning materials become more difficult for parents to handle. Increasingly, children turn to peers or other sources including private tutors for learning support, thus rendering parental involvement less gainful. One interesting point to note with the findings is that while non-involvement is linked to weaker academic efficacy among junior primary students, no specific gain in academic outcome is found with high level of parental involvement over low level. This implies that parents should spend at least some time with their young children in the homework process, but extended involvement does not necessarily lead to larger educational gains.

Second, the impact of parental involvement in homework is found to vary according to socioeconomic status. Parents' homework involvement is linked to higher gains in academic efficacy among children of parents with lower education attainment but not among those with more educated parents. This social-class differentiated impact of parental involvement supports Domina's (2005) longitudinal observation of U.S. elementary school students. In the ecological context of Hong Kong, middle-class students are likely to be provided with various learning resources and support, including private tutorials, enrichment classes, and extra learning materials, on top of parental help. Parental involvement in these cases constitutes only part of the repertoire of social and cultural capital supporting children's learning. Thus educational outcomes are less affected by parental participation in the homework process. Among working-class children, parent's involvement in homework is likely to be the only support for school learning, thus playing a pivotal role in affecting educational outcome. Yet, owing to the cross-sectional nature of the study design, it is possible to interpret the results from an opposite direction of cause-effect. Working-class parents may be more motivated to participate in their children's homework process when their children have better academic performance. The participation of middle-class parents is relatively stable regardless of children's achievement, as they are more likely to recognize the importance of parental involvement, and they are more confident in handling children's homework. Studies of longitudinal design are thus needed in order to investigate further into the direction of causation.

Conclusions and Implications

Results of this study provide evidence of parents' enthusiastic though varied involvement in the children's homework process in Hong Kong, where homework is used heavily as a learning tool. Variation in parental involvement in homework is found to relate to grade level as well as family socioeconomic

status. Differential gain in educational outcome with respect to parental involvement level is noted among junior primary students as well as those with parents of lower educational attainment.

The gain in educational outcomes in relation to parental involvement in homework among specific groups of students confirms the significance of involving parents in educational processes. From an ecological perspective, the developmental potential of a specific setting is enhanced when there are many supportive links between settings such as shared goals, mutual trust, positive orientation, and consensus, so that both can function as a harmonious network (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In such regard, the developmental potential of the school is enhanced through establishing shared goals and consensus with families. Homework has this potential role to play by bridging learning in school and at home. It is thus crucial for schools to cultivate parents' participation in the home-based learning process. Of significance is the need to encourage parental involvement in homework for students at the junior primary level as well as among those with lower socioeconomic status. Parent education programs focusing on developmentally appropriate homework involvement strategies can help parents to intervene more effectively in children's homework processes. On an informal basis, discussion with teachers on helping with children's homework also serves to strengthen parents' commitment to involvement and enhance their strategies and skills (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). The intrinsic appeal to parents of these school practices makes them potentially effective starting points for developing a full mode of home-school partnership that extends parental participation from home-based to school-based (Epstein, 2002).

Findings on this study are limited by its cross-sectional design as well as its specific scope on primary school students with a limited span of academic outcomes. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of parental involvement in homework, research is needed to examine the population of preschool and secondary schoolchildren. The use of longitudinal design should be considered so as to further explicate the direction of causal relationship between academic outcomes and parental involvement (Cooper, 2001). Investigation should focus on micro-level processes and mechanisms that go on between parent and child while homework is being carried out (Cooper et al., 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Finally, research on parental involvement needs to be expanded to other Chinese communities as well as other non-Western societies in order to deepen understanding on homework processes across sociocultural settings.

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Vicky C. Tam is a professor in the Department of Education Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University. Tam's research interest is on parenting and child development as well as qualitative methodology. Correspondence regarding this manuscript should be sent to Vicky C. Tam at Department of Education Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong, or vtam@hkbu.edu.hk

Raymond M. Chan is an associate professor in the Department of Education Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University. Chan conducts research in acculturation, teachers' professional development, and adolescents' life-skills development.

Appendix. Details on Research Instruments

Scale and Subscales	Number of Items and Sample Item	Response Format	Cronbach's Alpha
Parental involvement behavior			
Autonomy support	2 "We encourage our child to do homework by him/herself"	4-point format (1="never"; 4= "always")	.63
Direct involvement	4 "We check our child's homework so as to make sure that it is done"	4-point format (1="never"; 4= "always")	.62
Provision of structure	4 "We set up and enforce rules on homework"	4-point format (1="never"; 4= "always")	.61
Academic outcomes			
Interest in academic subjects	4 "I am interested in the subject of Chinese Language"	5-point format (1 = "Strongly Disagree"; 5 = "Strongly Agree)	.51
Academic efficacy	4 "I believe I can handle the subject of Chinese Language"	5-point format (0 = "Not at all"; 4 = "Very much")	.61
Efficacy for self-regulated learning	5 "How well can you plan and organize your academic activities?"	5-point format (0 = "Not at all"; 4 = "Very much")	.78

Educational Leadership for Parental Involvement in an Asian Context: Insights from Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Esther Sui-chu Ho

Abstract

This article examines how educational leadership defines parental involvement and shapes the nature of home-school collaboration in schools in an Asian context. Results show three major types of principal leadership, or *habitus* of parental involvement: bureaucratic, utilitarian, and communitarian, which provide a more powerful explanation for the extent and nature of home-school collaboration than parents' *capital* in this context. The present article adds to the existing literature by application of Bourdieu's concepts of *field, habitus,* and *capital* to understand the relationship between principals' leadership and different types of home-school relationships.

Key Words: educational leadership, home-school relationships, parental involvement, Bourdieu, theory of practice, capital, trust, utilitarian, bureaucratic, parents, teachers, principals, families, schools, collaboration

Background of the Study

Under the current global decentralization reform movement, parental participation in children's education at home and in school has been taking hold in England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Singapore, Brazil, Germany, France, Italy, the United States, and Canada (Beattie, 1985; Brown, 1990, 1994; Ho, 1997, 2003). Growing evidence of the beneficial effects of parents'

involvement on children's learning and school success has caused policymakers, educators, and educational researchers to seek ways to bolster parent involvement, in particular, that of disadvantaged parents (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996, Coleman, 1987; Henderson, 1988; Henderson & Mapp, 2002, Ho & Willms, 1996). In Hong Kong, the involvement of parents in their children's education was not formally recognized in educational policies until the pronouncement of the School Management Initiative (Education and Manpower Branch & Education Department, 1991), School Based Management (Education Department, 2000), and the Education Commission Report 7 (Education Commission, 1997). Since their introduction, these policies have fueled a growing interest in promoting parental involvement as one of the prime strategies for enhancing children's education and for improving the accountability of schools in the community. However, a number of studies to date have suggested that Asian parents are only prepared to support their children's learning *at home* (Ho, 2000; Shen et al., 1994). Additionally, these studies purport that school administrators and teachers are not generally receptive towards parental participation (Pang, 1997; Shen, 1995; Shen et al., 1994). It appears that people place different interpretations on the term "parental involvement" and have different perceptions of the limits to which parents can become involved in their child's school and the level of involvement that parents are prepared to undertake. Indeed, very little is known about how schools, teachers, and parents interpret the meaning of the term "parental involvement" and what value they place on it, nor have researchers profiled or accounted for the diverse forms of home-school relationships present in Asian schools.

Recent studies on home-school cooperation in Hong Kong, however, have confirmed that parents, regardless of their social background, are willing to participate in their children's education both at home and in the school setting (Ho, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; Pang, 2004). Although family background appears to be a powerful determinant of parental involvement, most parents, if duly encouraged, are able to devote extra time and effort to assisting with their children's education, both in the home and school settings (Ho, 1999, 2002, 2006). As shown in the literature cited, school practices largely determine how far parents are willing to invest their resources in actively engaging in their child's education (Brown, 1998; Comer et al., 1996; Epstein, 1990; Wolfendale, 1992). These findings are provocative because they suggest that school personnel can make a difference in the extent of parental involvement in schools. It has been determined, for example, that certain school leadership practices can mobilize a substantial number of parents to work with their child's school regardless of their social background (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Yet, little has been done in Asian societies to examine how

schools, teachers, and parents understand the meaning of parental involvement (Ho, 2002; Pang, 1997; Shen, 1995). Nor have we profiled and accounted for the diverse forms of home-school relationships under different forms of school leadership. The present article aims to fill this knowledge gap. Through a series of ethnographic case studies conducted in Hong Kong, this study investigates how three different principal leadership approaches relate to three different parental home-school relationships.

The purpose of this article is to examine the practice and the meaning of the concept of parental involvement as enacted in three heterogeneous Hong Kong primary schools. In this regard, I utilize Bourdieu's theory of social practice to identify the objective conditions of the field, both existing and emerging, where the practice of parental involvement is induced and experienced. Then, through an examination of the principals' respective habitus of leadership and deployment of capital, I will delineate how different forms of home-school relationships emerge. As Bourdieu's work has been used mainly to examine social reproduction and production of inequality through education rather than educational change, the present use of his theory of practice – to understand how and why parental involvement as a reform effort may initiate changes in the leadership approaches of principals – is groundbreaking.

Understanding the Logic of Parental Involvement from Bourdieu's Theory

Parental involvement in the schooling of their children is a practice that takes place within the social world. Bourdieu (1991) describes the social world as a multi-dimensional space that is comprised of intersecting fields. Such fields include social institutions (e.g., the family, the media, the medical system, the legal system, the education system) and also their trans-institutional forms or sub-fields (e.g., a particular family, hospital, law firm, or school). It is within all of these overlapping fields that humans assert themselves as individuals and/or as members of a group. Their action or practice is determined by their habitus, the capital they possess, and their ability to maneuver within a particular field. According to Bourdieu (1984, p. 11), any social practice can be accounted for by the following formula:

$$[(Habitus)\ (Capital)] + Field = Practice$$

Habitus is a system of dispositions acquired through one's experiences in different life dimensions – the family, schools, and the wider social, economic, and political environment (Bourdieu, 1977). The relationship of habitus to practice is interactive. Habitus is a "practice unifying" and "practice generating"

principle that shapes practices according to the objective situation in the field. Capital can be seen as resources (Bourdieu, 1986) which exist in three fundamental types: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital exists only in objectified form such as income and property. Cultural capital can be embodied in the form of dispositions and aptitudes, such as familiarity with highbrow culture and use of formal language; in cultural goods, such as the possession of books and works of art; and in institutionalized form, such as credentials, degrees, or public awards. Social capital consists of networks and connections with people with social prestige, and it may be institutionalized through the acquaintance in systems of noble title or recognition as a member of some social groups in higher social strata (Jenkins, 1992).

For a child's education, the field begins at home, as this is the setting where children are first guided to learn (albeit informally) and additionally encompasses the formal schooling system (i.e., from preschool through to university; Bourdieu, 1986). What the agents of the school field (i.e., principals, teachers, students, and parents) strive for is cultural capital (e.g., knowledge and credentials), as cultural capital can be cashed in other fields for social and economic capital (e.g., position and rewards; Lareau 1987, 1989). As the school field, like most other fields, is hierarchically stratified, those in higher positions (i.e., those who dominate) are sometimes resistant to change. In order to maintain and reproduce the structure of the field (i.e., the relative positions of agents within the field) certain logics of practice and/or rules of the game are instituted to regulate resources and capital. For example, upper-middle-class parents are more advantaged in helping their children strive for credentials than are parents in the lower socioeconomic strata, as upper-middle-class parents are typically more familiar with the language and etiquette practiced within the school field, because their own cultural capital is generally consistent with that of the child's school. This suggests that without changing the rules of the game in the educational field, decentralization and parental involvement will not bring about any marked improvement in school quality or social equality. Yet in order to redefine the rules of the game, the habitus of agents, especially the principals, must be understood since students, teachers, and parents are disposed to participate in the game based on their "acquired schemes of action" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 25).

Bourdieu's concept of capital has been used widely to examine the disadvantages of working-class parents in their involvement (Ho, 1999, 2000, 2006; Lareau, 1989, 2001). In this study, Bourdieu's theory of practice will be used to explain how the ideology and beliefs (habitus) of principals define their zone of acceptance (field) for parental involvement (practice) and how different types of family and/or school resources (capital) are being created and deployed.

Method and Design of the Study

This paper is part of the empirical work of a large scale project using mixed methods for investigating the nature and impact of diversified forms of parental involvement on children and schools in Hong Kong. The whole project started with case studies followed by a series of surveys of different stakeholders. This paper reports the major findings of the case studies in three primary schools. By way of the grounded theory methodology, this paper aims to explain the divergences and convergences in the practice and meaning of parental involvement amongst the three schools. The theoretical map derived at this stage of the project is adopted as the conceptual framework for generating and testing the hypothesis in the next stage of the project.

Profiles of Participating Schools

Three schools, Schools A, B, and C, from different social backgrounds and with different levels of parental involvement, were selected in accordance to with Ho's (1998) Hong Kong primary home-school collaboration study dataset. In that study, 40 schools that provided detailed parent information on their involvement were possible sites. The 40 schools were then sorted from high to low extent of involvement and categorized into three groups: high participation (top 30%), medium participation (middle 40%), and low participation (bottom 30%), according to an index of parents' reports of their involvement. The involvement index was assessed by 49 items modified and localized from Joyce Epstein's model measuring parents' participation in parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration (Epstein, 1990; Epstein et al., 2009). The profiles of the participating schools are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Background of the Three Participating Schools in the Study

Characteristics	School A	School B	School C
Year school established	1996	1988	1999
School size	30 classes	27 classes	30 classes
School instructional time	Whole-day	Whole-day	Whole-day
School location	A new town	A new town	A new town
Socioeconomic background of the student population*	Middle-class	Lower-middle-class	Working-class
Year PTA/HSC team established	1999	1996	2000
Level of parental participation as of 1999-2000	High	Low	Medium

*A crude measure based on the occupation of students' parents and their type of housing.

School A was established in 1996. Most of the parents of the children attending School A were middle class. According to a survey in 1998, the level of parental participation was considered high. School B was established in 1988 and was a half-day school with 30 classes. The average socioeconomic status (SES) of its parents was lower-middle class, and the level of parent participation was the lowest of all three of the schools. In 1999, School B switched from a half-day to a full-day school, but retained 27 of its classes. School C was founded in 1999. The School C parents were of mainly working-class origins, and their participation was perceived to be of a medium level. School C was a full-day school with 30 classes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Fieldwork was conducted from December 2001 to December 2002. During this period, we conducted a total of 68 interviews with the principals of the three schools, 18 teachers who were members of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) or home-school cooperation (HSC) teams, 18 "involved parents" who were either members of PTAs or active parent volunteers in the schools, and 29 non-involved parents whom we talked to at random either on the school premises or at school activities that parents attended. We also conducted participant observations of nine different activities organized by the PTAs or HSC teams of the three selected schools. This first phase of the research process took six months to complete transcription, data coding, and primary and secondary analysis in the manner of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded-theory approach is used in the present study to explore the different facets and manifestations of parental involvement so as to understand the underlying values and the implicit meanings different stakeholders ascribe to it. Data were then subjected to primary coding analysis. These codes were subsequently conceptualised and abstracted during a second phase of analysis to reveal pertinent themes and constructs (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Major Findings

1. Extracted the Meaning of Parental Involvement

A preliminary analysis of the case study field notes revealed parental involvement in all three schools was a multi-faceted, multi-layered, and complicated phenomenon, in so far as there were substantial divergences evident both across groups (e.g., among school principals, teachers, parents, and students) and within groups. In general, parental involvement in the three schools was shaped by both group beliefs and the individual and collective actions of group

members. Overall, there was no fixed meaning for the practice of parental involvement. Moreover, the meaning of parental involvement not only varied substantially among the three schools but also changed over time within the same school. Evidence from the case studies indicated that parental application and practice varied according to the personal and professional beliefs of each of the participating school principals. Moreover, their incorporation of parental involvement in their respective school's development plan was driven mainly by the principal's leadership approach to home-school collaboration.

For instance, the level of parental involvement in School A has dropped substantially, and their home-school collaboration has become more separated. This was shaped by the principal's view toward the purpose of parental involvement and her "selective" habitus of the "high" quality parents and her exclusion of some active working-class parents who previously volunteered at the school. In contrast, under the "inclusive" leadership of the principal in School C, housewives are welcome in the school. Many involved parents have changed their conception about themselves as a housewife and/or as a mother and derived some new understanding about the way teachers teach and students (including their own children) learn. This shift in their habitus took place through working together, running into conflict, resolving differences, and building trust between and among their fellow parents, the teachers, and principals. Similarly, in School B, quite a number of teachers from the schools under study – including those who cherished a negative perception about some parents and/or had a haphazard view on the practice of parental involvement – have come to acknowledge parents as potential "resources" for them as individual teachers or "instrumental" for the school to deploy in enhancing teaching and learning. This change in the *practices* of parental involvement demonstrates a shift in the *habitus* of different stakeholders towards parents with different *capital*, for some of them have started to understand and embrace the needs, concerns, and expectations of parents.

2. Complexity of Parental Involvement in Different Contexts

Although the importance of parental participation in children's learning was generally recognized by school principals and teachers, both expressed some ambivalence as to the relative merits of diverting school resources to mobilize and strengthen parental involvement. Opinions also differed as to the relative importance of parental involvement in decisions that pertained to school development. For instance, in School C, the principal considered parental involvement to be the foundation of his school's development. On the other hand, the principal of School A considered parental involvement peripheral to the main functions of the school (i.e., teaching and learning). The principals

of both School A and School B perceived parent volunteering to be a good resource for school development. However, they both expressed some concern that parental involvement could cause trouble within the school and could become an additional burden for teachers dealing with an increasing workload.

Overall, findings from the case studies have revealed that the form of leadership adopted by the three participating principals was a key factor shaping the area and level of parental involvement present in the schools, which in turn influenced the level and effectiveness of home-school relationships. Each of the three principal's individual leadership approaches will now be considered in turn.

3. Principal Leadership and Influence on Home-School Relationships

The logic of practice in parental involvement in each school is initially stipulated by the principal's habitus of leadership. Yet in reality, certain variations occur due to the different objective conditions of the field and the variation in the amount of capital perceived by the principals to be available to parents.

School A: Alienated Home-School Relationship Under Bureaucratic Leadership

In response to the policy guidelines of its sponsoring body and the recommendations of the Report No. 7 of the Education Commission of Hong Kong, School A set up a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in 1999. Under its provisions, an executive committee with two sets of members, parent members and teacher members, is formed every year. All seven functional positions (i.e., chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer, recreational officer, promotional officer, and liaison officer) on the PTA's Executive Committee are staffed by parent members. The teacher members are comprised of the principal, the vice principal, and four teachers, and assume a largely consultative role. There is also a working committee set up by the PTA, which is mainly staffed by parent members. However, it is only the parent members of the executive committee who meet with the teachers, and it is these members who form the bridge between the main body of school parents and the school's teaching and administration staff.

The principal of School A, Ms. A., agreed that the involvement of parents in the students' education was very important, since both home and school share responsibility for facilitating academic progress and personal growth. However, as the following comment reveals, Ms. A. had some reservations:

> …Parents should be involved in the learning of the students and be "supportive" to the school policies, but not directly involved in the school policies or administration. (Principal A, lines 14-33, p. 1)

She believed that teachers and parents have separate roles in the education of children and that the major role of school is not so much for nurturing and social gathering of parents. She stated:

> Home-school cooperation should remain at the theoretical level. Some other schools organize some social functions or parenting classes for parents. I think it is not the responsibility of the school [to organize such parent activities]. (Principal A, lines 114-118, p. 4)

Having defined parental involvement in such a way, Ms. A. devised a set of principles to delineate the functions of the school's PTA. Even though Ms. A. claimed to believe that the PTA provided parents with a channel to communicate with teachers, in her estimation, the first and foremost function of the PTA is to provide a mechanism for conveying school policies and, in doing so, ensure parental "acceptance" and "cooperation." In other words, when it came to policy-related issues, parental involvement was not perceived by Ms. A. to be a two-way channel of communication allowing parents to give feedback or their views on school policies and practices. The second principle (according to Ms. A.) is that the PTA is not an agent for promoting social relationships among parents and/or between parents and children. The third principle related to the school's administration and resource management. In her estimation, the school PTA needs to work primarily on its own, that is with minimum involvement from the school's teachers and with little recourse to school resources. She elaborated thus:

> We think that the main responsibility of teachers is teaching, not organizing the parent-teacher association. The school does not encourage teachers to put in too much time in **corresponding with parents. We** welcome parents to serve as volunteers at our school, and parents could put in extra time and energy for the parent-teacher association.…After all, the school is a place for education, not a venue to promote the parent-child relationship.…To organize parent-child activities would only occupy teachers' time unnecessarily, and they do not help the education of the students. The first and foremost mission of the school is to educate. What the school cares most about are the results on the report cards. The development of the parent-teacher association is secondary…. (Views elaborated by the principal at the first meeting of the PTA working committee on 1 November 2002)

Based on this set of principles, parental involvement in School A was restricted to certain non-teaching, non-administrative activities and tasks which were mostly initiated, organized, and manned by the PTA. They included coordinating recreational training courses for students, organizing the commencement day for primary-one students, organizing the school's opening day,

organizing school visits to and from other schools, sending thank-you cards to teachers, establishing a communication network among parents, and organizing other social and leisure activities for parents and students. In addition, the concerns and complaints of some parents were reported during one of the PTA meetings. These included the hygiene of lunchboxes and eating utensils provided by the school's external food vendor, the release of students after school without ascertaining whether parents were available to pick them up, the deteriorating hygienic condition of the lower-form toilets, and the non-marking of student reading reports.

The teachers of School A that we interviewed also supported the viewpoint of the principal on the role of parents in school. Teachers such as Ms. W. and Ms. L., both of whom volunteered to join the PTA and became its committee members, agreed with the principal that parents should serve as volunteers to the teachers on non-teaching and non-administrative tasks only. Ms. W. thought that parents should not be involved in teaching or school governance (Ms.W, line 74, p. 2), as these areas were "professional" territory of the school and of the teachers (Ms.W, line 75, p. 2).

With the operational principle at work by the principal and teachers in School A, all the parent members of the PTA of 2002-03 were of a certain educational level and over half of them worked full-time or on a flexible schedule. This group of parent members, being self-selected as well as hand-picked, was identified with the mission and function of PTA endorsed by the school. Mrs. X., the chairperson of the PTA of School A, viewed parental involvement as a means to get to know the teachers and their scope of work. To her, this was important to promote better and greater understanding between parents and teachers (Mrs. X., line 53-56, p. 2). She considered parental involvement via PTA activities as serving a supportive role to the teaching and operation of the school (Mrs. X., lines 81-82, p. 2). She agreed with the principal that teachers who were professionally trained had specialized knowledge and skills. So, parents who were involved in the school should only be assisting the teaching staff, but not participating in teaching or administration (Mrs. X., line 165, p. 4). However, other parents voiced their frustration towards the school. As one of the PTA parent members, Mrs. Y. complained, "(The school) treats the parents as if they were cheap labor. The school hasn't even thanked [us] for all the efforts that [we] have put in (before)" (Mrs. Y., line 466-469, p. 10). Others found it difficult to communicate with the teachers, saying that "in some school activities and in other occasions, many of the teachers were absent in parent activities" (Mrs. L., line 54-56 & 67-69, p. 2).

Overall, School A maintained a clear division of work between home and school, and between the separate roles of the principal, teachers, and parents.

For example, the main role of the teachers was to teach, not to organize leisure activities, which might enhance parent-student relationships (Principal A., line 91-96, p. 3). To Principal A, teachers are "professionals" and therefore parents should comply with their requests and support their decrees (Principal A., line 16-19, p. 1). Although School A hosted a number of parent involvement initiatives and were assessed as having relatively high levels of parental involvement in 1997-1998, under Ms. A.'s bureaucratic leadership habitus, the extent of parental involvement became limited to certain parents with more family capital, and the overall home-school relationship had become alienated when we conducted our in-depth case study in 2001-2002.

School B: Instrumental Home-School Relationship Under Utilitarian Leadership

School B's PTA had been established under the 1996 Education Commission's guidelines for the formation of PTA. Of all of the schools participating in the study, School B's PTA was the longest standing. The principal of School B outlined her school's commitment to the Education Commission's guidelines as follows:

> …according to the Education Commission, PTA or home-school cooperation is in the required "package" for the concept of school-based management for each and every school, and therefore we needed to organize it. Especially we belong to the charity organization, which is always the first to respond to new policies, new reforms, new research, and to follow the new trends in education reform. (Principal B, lines 167-172, p. 4)

In School B, a working committee had been established to steer the work of the PTA. It consisted of seven positions; the chairperson position was elected by parent members only. Each of the other six positions (i.e., vice-chairperson, treasurer, secretary, coordinator, recreational officer, and promotional officer) was co-staffed by one parent and one teacher. At the time of the interviews, all parent committee members were mothers. Four were employed in full-time work, and three were full-time homemakers. No training had been provided to either the current committee members or to the founding committee members. As a consequence, training was conducted on an ad hoc basis, with inexperienced parent volunteers completing tasks under the tutelage of more experienced committee members. In terms of the participation of the school staff, the principal employed a rotational practice for assigning teachers to join the PTA. In addition, she required all staff members to attend PTA activities at least twice per year. This rotation system was put in place to counteract the teachers' reluctance to assume responsibility for PTA duties.

The PTA of School B, like most PTAs in other schools, was responsible for organizing and running activities that promoted better parent-child relationships and enhanced parent-school communications, the rationale being that these activities would help to improve student learning and performance. One major operational task of the PTA was to recruit parents as volunteers to help out in PTA-organized school activities. The basic tasks performed by parent volunteers in School B included the monitoring of student discipline during the lunch hour, organizing and implementing both charity and environmental protection activities, as well as recreational activities to promote improved parent-child relationships. However, all of these tasks involved non-teaching or non-administrative work, except in the case of a small number of parents with specific craft skills (e.g., making beaded jewelry) who were invited to tutor students in specialized extracurricular courses.

Due to limited capacity (or scope of planning) many of School B's PTA activities had a numerical quota attached to them. The quota delineated how many parents were allowed to participate in each PTA activity. Thus, a raffle system was established to ensure that the selection of participants and volunteers was equitable. One of the administrative consequences of the quota system was that teachers were obliged to record the parent's volunteer hours on the students' report cards.

In assessing the relative importance of parental involvement as a school policy against the objectives of the school, Ms. B. provided the following summation:

> The roles of school and parents are equally important. Lacking either side would have a bad impact on the growth of kids. (Principal B, line 17-19, p. 1)

When subsequently asked, what is the specific role of parental involvement in meeting the objectives of the school?, Ms. B. revealed the following goals:

> To have more parents to come to participate in the school activities can (also) *build a positive reputation* for the school. We actually have required all parents to attend the organized parents' meetings, where there is always a theme for every meeting, and have recorded the attendance rate of every parent. As parents come to the school and see the work that the school has done, they *spread the word around and help the school to build a better reputation*. Also, with the expansion of the school and increasing demands from the Education Commission, such as a diversification of student activities, parents provide us with more human resources. (Principal B, line 165-162, p. 4, italics added)

According to Ms. B., parents should only be engaged in "low-level" activities, such as helping during lunch hour and reading stories. In line with this assertion, Ms. B. provided the following explanation:

> Parents would look at things sometimes only from the perspective of the students and only look out for the interest of their own children. They tend to see things from their own rather than different perspectives. If they engage in administrative level tasks (like we would have parents be on our Director's Board), it is probably not a good thing. Due to parents' relatively low educational level and lack of understanding towards the school, their involvement in school administration could be detrimental. (Principal B, lines 91-98, p. 4)

Ms. H., a senior teacher in School B who was a permanent member of the PTA, agreed with the principal that it was not a good idea to invite parents to take part in school governance or any teaching-related tasks. She explained:

> …[parent] members of the PTA have low educational level, and this will bring inconvenience to the school. Most of these members are not capable of running a meeting. The school simply cannot let them plan activities. Many parents are also afraid of challenges. They lack the confidence and are not willing to be involved in the administrative or teaching tasks. Unlike in the West, parents [in School B] cannot lead or organize activities for the PTA (Ms. H., lines 23-35, p. 1).

As for the involved parents of School B, particularly those who were PTA members, they identified with the functions and contributions of the PTA as stated in the operation manual of School B. For example, the PTA Chairperson, Mrs. M., defined home-school cooperation as parents assisting teachers in non-teaching and non-administrative work, such as making sure that students were in order during lunch time, helping out in extracurricular activities, and in reading stories to the students (Mrs. M., lines 371-375, p. 8).

Yet, some parents did find a gap between the purpose and practice of the PTA. Mrs. C., a full-time homemaker, with an assumption that the PTA would serve as a channel for parents to exchange opinions with teachers about how their children were doing at home and in school, found no such channel provided by the school (Mrs. C., lines 60-63, p. 2). As the chairperson, Mrs. M. said she sometimes found herself in a dilemma, as she was not sure about how to handle some complaints posed to her by other parents about the behavior of some teachers and the practices of the school (Mrs. M., lines 106-119, p. 2).

In sum, parental involvement for Principal B is little more than a pragmatic means of promoting the reputation of the school. Given Ms. B.'s narrow views on the suitability of having parents with low levels of education involved in the

operation of the school, it is reasonable to characterize her instrumental leadership approach as being "utilitarian." Most teachers share the principal's view, and some just accept the role in PTA as one of their routine duties assigned by the principal. Parents participate in school according to the boundaries set by the principal and find it difficult to fulfill their multiple roles of supporting the schools and representing other parents in advising the school.

School C: Mutual Trust Home-School Relationship Under Communitarian Leadership

In 2000, School C established a Home-School Cooperation (HSC) team instead of a PTA. School C's HSC is responsible for recruiting parent volunteers and planning and coordinating activities that promote parental involvement in the school. All of School C's parents are encouraged to get involved in the HSC. The HSC team was begun by a group of teachers who were themselves either self-selecting or appointed by the principal based on their aptitude and willingness. Hence, consensus to the HSC mission ensured that the functions of the HSC were maintained. Moreover, with the support of a community (non-government) agency, a parent academy was established to provide training to enhance the capacity of parents who wanted to be involved in School C's home-school operations.

At the inception of the HSC, the principal, Mr. C., affirmed that the growth and the development of a child is enriched and embraced within ecologies where family, school, and community all interact and collaborate. He explained the reason why he perceived parental involvement via home-school cooperation is valuable to the school as follows:

> …the concept of home-school cooperation…is that the school is *co-owned by both parents and teachers.* Parents and school could and should become partners so as to enhance the development of the children. (Principal C, lines 16-19, p. 1, italics added)

Mr. C. asserted that parental involvement is particularly critical in the lives of younger students, but also acknowledged that due to changes in family structure in contemporary society, many students in their formative years do not receive care from both parents. Furthermore, Mr. C. maintained that in the present social circumstances it was important that the school take the initiative and seek out the support of parents in order to establish a workable partnership (Principal C, lines 232-234, p. 6). He commented thus:

> There were several channels for parental involvement. First, and the most significant way, was to volunteer to help out in the school. The school required all parents who were interested in becoming volunteers in the school to undertake a volunteer training course, organized by the

Church or the community center. Parents could also join the parent academy, established by the school, to attend seminars on parental skills. Some parents chose to participate in formal and informal activities to stay involved in the school. (Principal C, lines 21-28, p. 1)

Mr. C. envisioned that in his school parental involvement would allow both parents and teachers to learn from each other, as parents would learn more about the mission of the school and the teaching methods of its teachers, while teachers would learn more about their students' backgrounds. In the following comment, Mr. C. expressed an opinion that collaboration generally was productive, as it provided students with better educational outcomes both in the home and school setting:

…[Our] school will frequently organize activities with the goal of enhancing parent-children relationships, as [we] hope that…parents will collaborate with the school to educate the children together. Through participating in these activities, both parents and teachers will have an experience in which they affect each other. This is progress that could *bring personal growth to both parents and teachers,* and [I] hope that it gives parents and teachers more opportunities to communicate with one another. I do not want to see any hostility among parents and teachers. (Principal C, lines 56-61, p. 1, italics added)

Mr. C's commitment to creating a partnership between the school and the family is widely shared by his colleagues. With this understanding, most of his colleagues, expected that: "…all parents will be attracted to come to participate in school activities" (Ms. C., Ms. K., & Ms. T., lines 70-72, p. 2). They anticipated that:

Through various kinds of social activities and casual contacts, the teachers and the parents will come to know and understand each other more. Gradually, a sense of mutual trust will be established among us. (Ms. C., Ms. K., & Ms. T, lines180-184, p. 5)

During the academic year of 2001-02, at the time of this study, the school had recruited more than 80 parents to be parent volunteers, which was a substantial increase when compared to the previous study in 1998 (Ho, 2002). Most of them had undergone training at the parent academy. One of the parent volunteers said that she "has come to know many parents, and my social network got expanded greatly." She also thought that she had learned new knowledge and skills and that her child was very proud of her and behaved especially well when she volunteered in school (Mrs. T., p. 2). In sum, the training provided to parents in School C helped them overcome deficits in cultural capital. Principal C.'s commitment to nurture parents helped not just to

enhance parents' capability in helping out the school, but also groomed parents into a community of learners. Through mutual sharing and collaboration, a trust relationship had been built between parents and teachers.

In sum, working from a communitarian mindset, the principal of School C was able to see all parents as important partners in helping students learn. Moreover, with the collaboration of a small core of parents and the one community agency actively involved with the school, the principal was able to solicit support from the rest of the school's parents in establishing a long-term, enriching, two-site learning environment. It may well be, therefore, that Mr. C.'s leadership approach to parental involvement in schools may become the model for other HSC's.

To summarize, the practice of parental involvement in a school setting is a complex phenomenon. Given different styles of school leadership and dispositions of different stakeholders, the form of parental involvement enacted or induced in different schools will vary, which in turn develops different forms of home-school relationships.

The school principal manifesting a *bureaucratic leadership* approach considered school as a formal organization with a rigid division of labor for teachers in school and for parents at home. Parents of children attending such schools tend to have an *alienated* relationship with the school. The school principal manifesting a *utilitarian leadership* approach typically viewed parents as tools for promoting the school's reputation and for fulfilling the home-school policy mandates of the central government. Parents of children attending such schools tend to establish an *instrumental* relationship with the school. Finally, the *communitarian* principals viewed the school as a small community and emphasized informal, enduring, and *trusting* relationships formed between home and school.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that parents predominately from the working class are no more passive in their involvement in their child's school than are parents of students attending schools in more affluent communities. The study found that working-class parents are as involved and sometimes even more passionate about education than are their middle-class counterparts. Deficits in different kinds of capital can be mitigated by school leadership practices. The study has observed that school principals are the major definers of the practice of parental involvement. The principal's ideology actually shapes how parental involvement is defined by the school stakeholders and what forms of home-school relationships are constructed in schools.

During the interviews with principals, it was found that the construction of principals' leadership/habitus approaches towards parental involvement needs to be contextualized within the societal context (i.e., changing of family structure and family life) and the educational context (i.e., current education reform and educational policies) of the specific sponsoring bodies which establish the school. Principals' beliefs in education to include or exclude certain parents with different amounts of capital and principals' past interactions and experiences with parents are major factors affecting each leaders' habitus, which in turn influences their strategies and practices for home-school collaboration.

This study revealed that three major types of leadership approaches (or in Bourdieu's term, habitus) towards parental involvement are present in schools: bureaucratic, utilitarian, and communitarian. Yet, principals' habitus also affects teachers' views on the value of parental involvement. School principals with bureaucratic leadership approaches tend to consider parental involvement as being peripheral to the main concerns of the school (i.e., teaching and learning). In such situations there is a rigid division of work between home or parents' work and school or teachers' work. As a result, an *alienated* relationship emerges and parents and teachers are disconnected from each other. School principals with a utilitarian leadership approach consider parents to be a tool or resource which can be utilized to support the school's educational practices and to promote the reputation of the school to the wider community. Therefore, only those parents who fulfill this concept of resource and have an appropriate knowledge base are accepted in the school's PTA. As a result, an instrumental relationship forms between the home and the school. School principals with a communitarian leadership approach believe parents to be the co-owners of the school and, in conjunction with the school, pursue a holistic, quality education for all of the school's students. Communitarian principals recruit enthusiastic teachers to coordinate parent activities and parents are made to feel welcome in the school. They have space to volunteer in school activities. In such circumstances, teachers perceive parents as partners. Teachers connect with parents and provide opportunities for parents to learn through their involvement with the school. Parents feel empowered and a bond of mutual trust is established. These three leadership approaches are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Principals' Leadership Habitus and Home-School Relationships

Leadership	Bureaucratic	Utilitarian	Communitarian
Ideologies	Principal A saw school governance and administration as the responsibility of professional educators and believed that it was inappropriate for parents to have any say in school governance issues.	Principal B agreed with the concept of greater parental involvement in the school as it provided extra human resources to run various programs. The school set up its PTA to comply with governmental policy.	Principal C believed that parents are co-owners of the school. Teachers, the family, and the school all join together united in the same goal. Parental involvement provides children with a quality, holistic education.
Views on Parents	Parents of low education level are quite troublesome, as rumor tends to spread easily among them. These easily spread false messages can have an undesirable impact on the school.	Parents can only perform supportive tasks because they are inexperienced with educational or administrative matters. Parental involvement alleviates teacher workloads.	What is crucial is that parents are sincere in their desire to volunteer in school. Working parents are capable individuals well able to provide effective assistance to schools.
Home-School Relationship	**Alienated** Schools as formal organizations characterized by a rigid division of labor for teachers in school and parents at home.	**Instrumental** School as policy tool: Parents can be utilized for supporting school education and promoting the reputation of the school to the community.	**Trusted** Schools viewed as a small society, an organization that emphasizes informal and enduring trusted relationships between home and school.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been used in previous home-school collaboration studies for understanding the inequality of *practice,* which relates to parental involvement in schools (Bourdieu, 1973, 1974, 1977; Harker, 1990; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2001). Application of Bourdieu's theory of practice (1990), however, remains rare (Lingard & Christie, 2003). Findings from this paper suggest that the concept of *habitus*

appears to be a more powerful factor than *capital* in understanding the practice of parental involvement in the different fields of home and school. In particular, the principal's habitus appears to be a major determinant of parental involvement, especially since Chinese parents generally trust schools and respect school professionals. Moreover, recent international research into school autonomy suggests that the principals' relative autonomy in making school decisions is even higher in Hong Kong than in OECD countries (Ho, 2005). As a result, leadership habitus of principals appears to be one of the most important factors affecting the extent of parental involvement in schools. This observation is consistent with the deep structure and culture of Hong Kong schools (Walker, 2004).

In sum, evidence emerging from the present study challenges the deterministic view of the home advantage of middle-class parents and the deficits of working-class parents because of their differing amounts of capital. It can be tentatively argued that principal habitus rather than parental capital provides a more powerful explanation for the extent and nature of home-school collaboration. Application of Bourdieu's concept of habitus in the research of educational leadership, which allows for contextual constraints and individual possibilities, is a promising avenue for further theoretical understanding of the work of principals in home-school collaborations.

From a practical perspective, all principals in the case studies agreed that parents are additional resources for schools which are still largely untapped, especially in Asian societies. Yet differences in the principal's leadership habitus result in the formation of different strategies for tapping into this parental resource. The communitarian leadership approach appears to have the most inclusive habitus, as it recognizes that parents, regardless of their social background, can be nurtured and mobilized for the benefit of the students' education. These findings are consistent with some current case study and large scale survey studies in the United States (Griffith, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2002), which argued that principals' actions and behaviors as school leaders are major determinants that linked to facilitating factors in promoting school-community collaboration and higher levels of parental involvement.

Yet it is unrealistic to expect educators to assume a communitarian leadership role in working with parents without providing them with the necessary time and resources. They need the extra time and resources in order to work on the construction, implementation, and ongoing engagement of the HSC/PTA and to access information and community resources for parents. This requires recognition that being a professional teacher (or principal) no longer simply relates to teaching duties. It also includes working with families and communities. As such, this broadening of roles should be an integral element

or credentialing requirement in the professional competencies framework (ACTEQ, 2006).

The challenge for current principal leadership training programs is that communitarian leadership is more of a shared construct than a hierarchical or bureaucratic one. As Walker (2004) suggested, shared leadership is difficult, given the established hierarchical leadership structure within traditional Hong Kong schools. However, such a change is not impossible, based on the evidence collected in the present study. Certainly, it is unfair to place the responsibility for home-school collaboration on principals and teachers without giving them training to develop skills in working with families. Preservice education is one way to help aspiring principals to reflect on their own leadership habitus and to understand their new role of developing home-school collaboration. As Lingard and Christie (2003) noted, principals need to reflect on their own practices and on how to harness their untapped resources of parental capital regardless of parental social background. Also, time is required for parents and teachers to gain experience, reflect on, and make contributions to the new emergent communitarian approach to leadership habitus and practice.

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Esther Sui-chu Ho is a professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Administration and Director of the Hong Kong Center for International Student Assessment, Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. She was consultant for Macau-PISA project and China-PISA project; she was principal investigator of the Home School Collaboration Project and Hong Kong PISA Project. Her research interests include: sociology of education; parental involvement; home-school-community collaboration; school effectiveness and school reform; decentralization and school-based management; research methodology in education; and multilevel analysis in educational research. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Esther Ho, Sui-chu, Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, HONG KONG, or estherho@cuhk.edu.hk

Broadening the Myopic Vision of Parent Involvement

Margaret M. Ferrara

Abstract

Parent involvement in schools – what do you believe about it? Disparate groups, like front office staff at a school, preservice teachers, teachers, school administrators, and parents respond quite differently to focus questions, which might include: What do you see as important aspects of parent involvement? What parents do you think would probably not want to be involved in parent involvement activities at the school? Do you know enough about parent involvement? Is it important to be informed anyway? Survey questions queried teachers, classified staff, parents, administrators, and preservice teachers on their perceptions of parent involvement. The purpose of this study was to unravel common threads within the data, which revealed a very narrow understanding of parent involvement. This narrow understanding needs to be broadened if, indeed, we ever want to see parent involvement as a systemic, important foundation for student learning. The study discloses that each group had a disparate view of what constitutes parent involvement. The least vocal group in this discussion is the parent; the most vocal is the teacher. The conclusion is that it is inherently important to provide training for preservice and current teachers to help broaden the often myopic vision of parent involvement.

Key Words: preservice teachers, administrators, teachers, parents, parental involvement, teacher candidates, perceptions, broadening myopic vision, family, families, office staff, elementary, middle, high schools, districts, surveys

The Disconnect in Looking at the Problem of Parent Involvement

Walk into a school and immediately one can sense the level of parent involvement. A sign in the hall warns those who enter to report to the office. The office is bustling with activity, and parents stand at the counter waiting to be recognized and welcomed. Classrooms have their windows covered in elementary schools so that parents cannot see inside. Is this a welcoming school? Are schools becoming more "fortress" schools rather than open to parent visits and involvement? (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Is there a chasm of misunderstanding between the home and the school? What creates this lack of understanding? Administrators, teachers, and front office staff create the climate of the school. Teachers and clerical staff, which include front office staff, project the climate of the school and set up the level of the responsive tones of welcome or rejection (Berger, 2008). Preservice teachers enter the classroom with a fixed perspective on what roles parents should play in their instructional day. The problem also lies in an inverse reality – parents are choosing not to come to school. Parents are not visible in many schools, especially during critical times like conferences or schools events (e.g., Lott, 2001). Or is it rather that parents are seen as intrusive? Parents, especially those who are from diverse cultures as compared to the dominant culture at the school, report that they do not feel welcome; consequently, they avoid coming to school and sometimes take on an adversarial stance with school faculty (Lott, 2001).

Stating the Problem

Many studies on parent involvement attempt to capture facets of parent involvement through a focused perspective – the parent (e.g., Olivos, 2004), the teachers (e.g., Shartrand, Kreider, & Erickson-Warfield, 1994), or the administrator (e.g., Rishel, 2008). A broader understanding of parent involvement, however, is not limited to disparate groups but rather open to multiple voices responding to similar questions and sharing their perceptions about the importance and the challenges of parent involvement. As a final and perhaps more significant point, once the crux of the matter is identified, what can be done about this common finding?

The purpose of this study was to look at multiple disparate groups who play an integral role in parent involvement, to explore what perceptions these groups have in common, and in which areas there are discrepancies. This narrow understanding needs to be broadened if, indeed, we ever want to see parent involvement as a systemic, important foundation for student learning (Henderson et al., 2007).

Building on the Research

There are many perspectives about parent involvement. Common threads within the data reveal a very narrow understanding of parent involvement within the education community. We need to broaden this understanding to promote student learning.

From a global perspective, we learn from researchers that there are multiple positives of parent involvement in schools. For one thing, parent involvement increases students' academic achievement (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, Jacob, Kernan-Schloss, & Raimondo, 2004) and, equally important, it promotes positive student attitudes and behaviors (Jeynes, 2007). Researchers also found that when parents are involved in their children's education, there is an increase in students' school attendance and an increased sense of positive feelings of self (Berger, 2008; Fan & Chen, 2001; Mendoza, 2003). These findings provide credible evidence to support a school faculty that strives to promote students' academic excellence with the involvement of parents in multiple roles in the school.

Ironically, this is not the norm. Many parents are unsure of their roles in the school and this feeling of "un-connectedness" grows stronger as their children move from grade to grade in middle and high school. Even though mother and father are the child's first teachers, the role of the parents as the support teachers in the home fades quickly once the child enters school (Epstein, 2001).

Preservice teachers and teachers tend to develop their own sense of parent involvement from their cultural backgrounds (Shartrand et al., 1994). Teachers in the field also influence candidates during practicum and student teaching experiences. Classroom teachers will readily admit that they have had very little training, if any, in working with parents (e.g., Baker, Kessier-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999). Even today, there is limited professional development at the school or district level that incorporates the importance of the role of parents and how classroom professionals can harness this parental power as a means of improving and sustaining student learning (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Shartrand et al., 1994). These barriers to effective parent involvement are fortified and upheld in a school environment that places little value on the participation of parents and even less on parent roles that go beyond the traditional roles such as attending conferences.

Parents also may not be encouraged to participate in school activities, especially if teachers perceive parents as not knowledgeable or experienced enough for teaching tasks. Demographic fences that surround many of our local schools present challenges to meaningful parent involvement. These barriers place parents in environments of cultural differences that foster shame and feelings of

failure (Miretzky, 2004; Olivos, 2004). Economic demands (e.g., both parents working to make ends meet for the family) also limit parents' availability to come to the school (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002).

The role of the principal is critical in shaping the perceptions of teachers and staff in a school. Flessa (2008) writes that principals attribute students' unsatisfactory results of academics or social mores on parents: "They say what parents are not doing – not attending school functions, not helping with work at home" (p. 18). Principals tend to rely on the deficit model – what parents are not doing – rather than looking at what means are in place to encourage parents to be more involved in schools.

The clerical staff is as critical as the other players in parent involvement. The simple phrase "Office staff are friendly" is the first criteria for an open-door school. An unfriendly barrier may be created by staff perceptions that parents are intrusive, do not speak English, and come without an appointment. In reality, parents may not understand school protocol (Dunlap & Alva, 1999).

The total picture of parent involvement is one that is crafted from these multiple visions and helps explain the harmony and disharmony of focus in parent involvement perspectives in education. Can these visions – these perceptions – be brought together into one vision of understanding so that schools, families, and the community will indeed work together to contribute to children's academic and social success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)?

The Methodology

Research Design and Data Instruments

A research team from the local school district designed this study in collaboration with this university researcher. A pilot study had been conducted the previous year by the school district team. An analysis of the pilot survey helped the research team design each question using more specific language and more alignment with each of the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) standards (2005-2006) that served as the guideposts for the surveys:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcomed as volunteers in the schools.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect their children/families.
- Parents, school, and community collaborate in order to enhance student learning, strengthen families, and improve schools.

The research team worked through focus group meetings with the Parent Involvement Council to redraft the survey questions that were sent to parents, clerical staff, teachers, and administrators. The Council is a representative group from the school district, the university (education and medical departments), the community, diversity groups (e.g., Hispanic League), and special interest groups (e.g., gifted education).

The administrator survey involved two areas of interest – a checklist of a variety of parent involvement activities (e.g., family night, Morning Mug). The second half of the survey attempted to capture the principals' awareness and knowledge of parent involvement, their attitudes toward parent involvement, and the current state of parent involvement in their respective schools. The principals were from three levels – elementary, middle, and high school. The teachers in each school, who were either certified (teachers) or classified (front office staff and teacher aides), also were asked to rate how well their school involved parents. As in the principals' survey, the first set of questions related to each of the six PTA standards of parent involvement. The second half of the survey was similar to the principal survey.

The university researcher also designed a survey that was administered to preservice teachers about their perceptions of parent involvement. They completed these surveys at three points in their teacher preparation coursework – in their introductory courses, their methods courses, and during their internship. This study captures preservice teachers' perceptions during their sophomore and junior years. The questions in the preservice teacher survey focused on assessing perceptions of which type of families (e.g., traditional, single-parent) and family variable characteristics (e.g., degree of education, level of English proficiency) were likely to be more involved in their child's education.

Data Distribution

A parent survey (n = 18,509) was mailed to each parent whose child/children were in an elementary, middle, or high school in the district; English and Spanish versions were available. The respondent rate for the parent surveys was over 88% (n = 16,288). Surveys were sent to each teacher, clerical staff member, and administrator at each high school, middle school, and elementary school through an email. Participants answered these surveys through Zoomerage.com; the surveys were then distributed through a center for program evaluation outsourced by the school district. Each participant had an opportunity to add comments as text for each question in the survey.

Surveys were also distributed by the university researcher to preservice teachers (n = 125) in their introductory or in their practicum courses in the teacher education program. The items in these surveys aligned to the PTA

standards and provided opportunities for preservice teachers to share their perceptions about various kinds of parenting systems and parent participation in their children's education. As in the school district survey, the surveys of preservice teachers were in their two levels of teacher preparation – elementary and secondary (middle school and high school). Surveys were tallied by frequency and mean scores.

Sample Population

Parents

Overall, the parents demonstrated the highest respondent rate, 88%, as compared to that of principals, teachers, and clerical staff. Not surprising, more than three-quarters of the surveys (13,021) were completed by mothers (80%). The highest responses were from parents of middle school students (31%) and the majority of the respondents (80%) completed the survey in English. The survey respondents also indicated that 47% have lived in the school district 20 or more years. These data seem to indicate that parents have had many years of experience working with and under the local school system.

Administrators

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of administrator survey responses. Out of the 92 elementary, middle, and high school principals, 50% of the school principals (n = 46) completed the survey. Just over half of the administrators from the elementary schools responded (n = 33), and 54% of the middle school (n = 7) and 46% of the high school leaders (n = 6) responded to the survey. At first glance, this could be reported as a respondent rate of 48%. The confusion with this number is that typically an elementary school has one to two administrators and the number of administrators increases at the middle school level (typically 3) and the high school (typically 5). As the number of potential administrators increased from elementary to high school, the respondent rate for the survey decreased rather than increased. In actuality, the respondent rate was 35% when the total number of administrators was taken into account. Therefore, the study actually shows a clearer picture of the perception of an elementary school principal.

Figure 1. Administrator survey responses
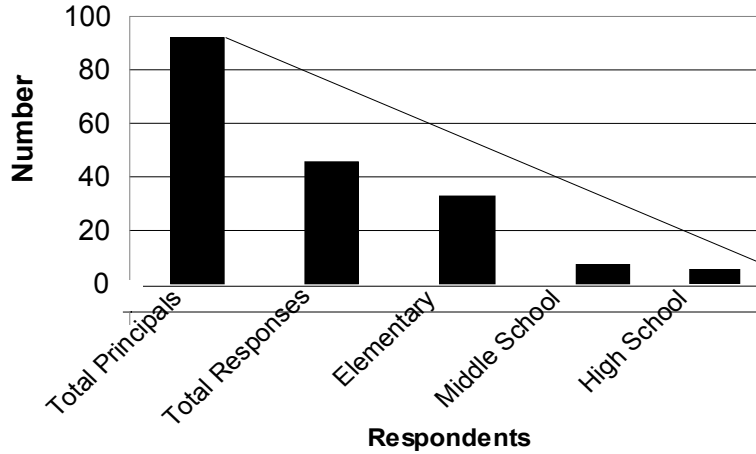
Teachers and Clerical Staff

In the survey, the word "staff" included both teachers (certified staff) and front office or support faculty (clerical staff). Some schools had accepted response rates (55%) and in other schools, there were no respondents. Overall, only 14% of the teachers and 35% of the classified staff in the district, a total of 1,200 out of 5,580, completed the survey. Most of the respondents were from the elementary schools (57%), followed by the high schools (30%), and the middle schools (12%).

Preservice Teachers

Surveys for the preservice teachers were administered in a course prior to an activity that focused on parent involvement. The respondent rate was high, as attendance is part of the grade in the course. The students in the courses were typically white females (80%) and had lived in the state for most of their lives. The 125 preservice teachers in the mixed sophomore course ($n = 60$) and secondary teachers in the junior general methods course ($n = 65$) represented a cross section of all students in the teacher preparation program. The sophomore course included a mix of elementary, secondary, and special education majors.

Hearing the Voices of Each Group

Parents

Many of the questions in the survey were aligned either to the PTA standards or to items on the School Friendly Standards. Parents overall reported that they felt welcomed into their children's schools by the front office staff (89%, 80%, and 78% of elementary, middle, and high school parents, respectively) or when they called the school (90%, 87%, and 86%).

Table 1. School Interaction with and Feedback from Parents

	Elementary	Middle	High
I feel welcome at the school			
% Agree	89%	83%	81%
% Disagree	4%	6%	6%
I feel welcome by other parents			
% Agree	64%	47%	51%
% Disagree	7%	7%	8%
Front office employees are polite to me			
% Agree	89%	85%	85%
% Disagree	5%	7%	7%
School employees are polite when I call			
% Agree	91%	87%	87%
% Disagree	8%	11%	10%
School wants my ideas to make school better			
% Agree	57%	43%	39%
% Disagree	23%	46%	48%
Parents are important partners			
% Agree	85%	75%	71%
% Disagree	4%	7%	9%
When I need help, I know whom to talk to			
% Agree	85%	75%	71%
% Disagree	6%	11%	14%
Ever volunteered?			
Yes	70%	44%	55%
No	38%	56%	46%
Never volunteered but want to			
Yes	60%	56%	48%
No	40%	44%	52%
Willing if asked to volunteer			
Yes	69%	50%	56%
No	31%	50%	44%

Table 1 reflects that parents responded favorably to five of seven questions regarding interpersonal relations with school personnel and the feeling of being wanted and respected for ideas about the school. Surveyed parents did not feel generally welcome at school by other parents and seemed to believe that administration and faculty did not want their ideas for school improvement.

Most parents believe that as school partners, they are important to the success of the school. Approximately 77% believe this to be true. There is also a high percentage (78%) of parents who are confident that when they need someone at the school to talk with, they know whom to contact. However, 46% do not believe that their ideas to improve the school are accepted as worthwhile.

The data shown in Table 1 also reveal untapped parent involvement opportunities. Over half of parents surveyed – 2,027 respondents among the three school divisions – indicate that parents want to volunteer. When asked about their level of involvement at the school, 38%-56% of the parents acknowledged that they did not ever volunteer in their children's school. When further probed to see if they would like to volunteer, 48%-60% of those parents said they would be willing to volunteer. Elementary parents were willing to volunteer (69%) more frequently as compared to middle school parents (50%) or high school parents (56%). Given these data, it behooves the school administration and faculty to make concerted efforts to utilize this valuable resource. The data resurface the question that should be asked: Why are so many parents reluctant to volunteer in the schools?

How do parents gain information about what is taking place at the school? Table 2 shows some of the typical ways that parents reported on how they keep abreast of school events.

Table 2. Parent Responses to Query on Sources of Information about School

	Elementary	Middle	High
Children's Folders	43%	14%	11%
Flyers from School	14%	10%	8%
"My Child Tells Me"	10%	18%	18%
Phone Calls from School	10%	15%	14%
Newsletter	8%	8%	14%
Edline	6%	29%	28%
Teacher Tells Me	5%	3%	2%
PTA	2%	1%	.2%

The data in Table 2 show several sources for parents' information about their children's schools. The reported use of children's folders as sources of information in middle and high schools is not based on what actually happens in these schools, as folders are generally not used at these levels. Elementary school parents generally do not use Edline, the district's Internet data reporting program, but middle and high school parents did report it as a source of information, albeit less than 30%. However, when parents were asked, "Do you use Edline to track your child's progress?," 15% of the elementary parents

responded, "Yes," whereas middle school (57%) and high school (62%) parents indicated they use Edline to track their children's progress. These data appear to be inconsistent with data responses to parents' sources of information and Internet access. It should be noted that Edline is not available on the elementary level; elementary parents who responded affirmatively may be confused about this program.

On average (77%), parents from all school levels agree that the schools keep them informed about their children's grades and learning and that they understand the meaning of report card grades. Also, 85% agree that the school is diligent in providing assistance with homework and learning. Overall, there is a slight decrease in support as the child moves into high school in terms of grades and report card interpretation. The Edline program appears to be supporting students and their parents to some degree, but later questions brought some issues with Edline to closer scrutiny, as reported below. Most parents do report they have Internet access in their homes. Table 3 shows the frequency of parents' attendance at school events which were publicized via Internet (using parent e-mail addresses) and frequency of contacting the school online, as these are related to home Internet access. The percentages of interaction decrease as the child moves to middle school and then high school. Home Internet access is high.

Table 3. Parent Interaction: Attendance, Contact, and Home Internet Access

	Elementary	Middle	High
School Events Attended			
1-2	23%	28%	25%
3-5	46%	42%	35%
6-10	19%	15%	17%
11+	7%	8%	17%
Parents Contact the School			
1-2	17%	19%	17%
3-5	40%	43%	41%
6-10	27%	25%	27%
11+	12%	11%	12%
Home Internet Access	79%	84%	88%

Traditionally, parents of children in elementary and middle schools attend many of the school's functions. As students progress through the system, parents attend fewer functions than when their children were in elementary school. High school parents more than likely attend many of the athletic events, especially if their children are participating or if the teams are in a winning season. A survey question asked, "In the past school year, how many times have you

contacted the school, for any reason?" The parents' responses show a general reluctance of parents to call the school. It seems that they called the school more often if their children were in trouble or failing their subjects.

In a closer inspection, given the high Internet access, there is an alarming number of parents who are not accessing Edline. The data seem to indicate that parents do not know how to access and use the Edline website. Another point that is clear with a closer inspection of the data is that parents from non-Title I schools who had lived in the district more than 20 years were more likely to have Internet access at home (87%) than Title I parents (55%). Also, more parents who are white (93%) as compared to non-white parents (64%) had Internet access at home. If the schools' administration and faculty are using Edline as a means of communicating with parents and increasing parent involvement, they need to reevaluate the use of this program. The posting of information on Edline by teachers should be 100%, and parents should know how to access it via home computers or through sources such as the library.

As the student moves through a K-12 system, it is less likely for parents to contact the school on an average of 3-5 times a year (46%, 42%, and 35%). Typically, 69% of the elementary school parents attend between 1-5 school events a year, which is similar to the level of attendance for middle school parents (70%). High school parents attend events less frequently (60%). In an analysis from the pilot study about what opportunities are afforded parents at school, only a one-night event, such as a multicultural night or meet the teacher night, is listed as a way to attract high school parents into the school beyond sports events.

Administrators

The vast majority of the principals who responded to the survey noted that they provided their parents with a calendar of events for school activities at the beginning of the school year, provided information about standardized testing and about assistance to low-income families, and invited parents to participate in school committees. Likewise, the majority of principals invited parents to a "Back to School Night" and provided parents with an access number to contact the school. When principals held a parent night, 41% responded that they had an interpreter available for Spanish-speaking parents.

What principals were missing, however, was how the parents were an essential resource in the school and how the school could provide learning for parents. Fewer than 20% of the principals overall found a way to include parents in the school as partners in academic programs or in school governance. Parents were not taken into consideration for workshop opportunities and technology skill development.

Table 4. Administrators Reports of Volunteer Opportunities for Parents

Parents Assist with Music Events	8%
Staff Training in Parent Involvement	11%
Parent Involvement in Staff-related Issues (Hiring)	15%
ESL Courses for Parents	15%
Parent Organization Workshops	16%
Computer Courses for Parents	17%

Interestingly, Table 4 depicts that less than 20% of the principals indicated that their school had some of these opportunities for parents, opportunities that parents cited on previous surveys as areas in which they would like to be involved, including parent education and decision-making. Administrators, on the other hand, felt that parent involvement activities should be social events, like an ice cream social, family game night, or multicultural night. The district team developed a Parent Strategic Plan the previous year, and it was shared with the administrators before the survey was administered. Even though 83% of the administrators reported that they received a copy of the plan, only 27% reported that they had shared this document with their staff. Less than half (37%) of the principals surveyed had participated in any district-level meetings, training, or orientation for the Parent Strategic Plan. When asked their opinion of the potential effectiveness of the district's plan, over 40% of the principals indicated that "IF" the plan became a reality, it would lead to an increase in parent involvement. However, almost the same percentage indicated they are not familiar enough with the plan to have an opinion about the parent initiatives in it.

Most principals reported that the majority of their teachers and other (non-teaching) staff communicate effectively with parents at their school. When asked what the greatest barrier was to increasing parent involvement at their school, almost half of the principals said parents' work schedules or other events prevented parents from participating.

The principals rated three of the six standards on how they would like to see parents involved and how the school district team can provide support – student learning, volunteering (especially tutoring), and decision making and advocacy (such as more involvement in PTA, PTO, or PFA). Some just wrote that they wanted parents to show up and attend events. A few others believed that there was no need for change. When administrators were probed about how they could improve parent involvement in their schools, they addressed the needs of teachers. The common response is that the teachers have too much already "on their plate" and they would like to increase parent involvement without "too much additional burden" on their teachers.

Staff Data

Staff, including teachers and support staff, generally reported that their initiatives fared well in increasing parent communication and involving parents in students' learning. The staff did not believe that parent participation in school governance or volunteering was strong. Staff at the elementary schools perceived that their schools were stronger in parent involvement strategies than staff at the middle and high schools. The opinions of staff contrasted to the principals in that staff wanted to see more parents volunteering, mostly expressed as the desire for parents to help as tutors or with clerical work such as photocopying. Some respondents mentioned parents serving as crossing guards or patrol helpers, or assisting with non-classroom activities such as lunchroom, recess, and field trip supervision. The second area, mentioned with less frequency, was help with student learning. Specifically, staff wanted parents to make sure their children were completing their homework and using good study habits. To a lesser degree, teachers and staff wanted to have improved or increased communication with parents. This included calling or contacting teachers and using Edline for students and parents to access grades and homework assignments. Related to school decision-making and advocacy, staff wrote they would like to see a parent organization such as the PTO formed or simply that parents should "take back the PTO." Another theme indicated the staff would like to see more responsible parenting practices. These practices may include getting children to school on time, helping children take more responsibility for their behaviors, and ensuring that responsible adults provide for children's basic needs such as clothing and nutrition. Though it was not mentioned with as much frequency, some staff wanted parents to have a welcome, safe environment. These expressed desires included helping parents feel welcome at school and the feeling of being safe in the work of the classroom.

Most negative comments in the set of surveys came from certified teachers who expressed frustration about parent involvement, for example, "I don't believe it is our responsibility to teach parents how to be parents." Some believed that the Parent Outreach Coordinator should assume the responsibility of coordinating parent involvement activities. There were also comments, interestingly enough, about teachers who were going to try to find a copy of the Parent Involvement Strategic Plan or their School Improvement Plan and read more about what the school and school district had stated about parent involvement. These comments appear to show that these teachers had little, if any, involvement in writing the School Improvement Plan. A final note is that teachers who did respond to the survey also wrote positive comments. Most of the teachers' positive comments expressed the belief that parent involvement is

"the most important factor in creating their child's academic, social, and emotional success in school and life."

Preservice Teacher Data

Two groups of preservice students received a survey to ascertain their awareness of, their knowledge of, and their professional judgment about parent involvement. At the time of the administration of the survey, preservice teachers had minimal coursework in parent involvement strategies. Their previous course of study only included one module on the relationship between the No Child Left Behind Act and parent involvement. The preservice teachers also had completed a 30-hour field experience helping a teacher in a classroom. Most preservice teachers' coursework taken later, at the end of the junior year and in the senior year, includes integrated parent involvement activities.

Table 5. Preservice Teacher Perceptions: Degree of Involvement by Parent Structure and Communication

Parent Structure and Communication	Mixed Sophomores	Secondary Juniors
Predicted Level of Involvement		
Parents Employed Full-Time	39%	61%
Elementary Parents	96%	89%
Middle School Parents	85%	78%
High School Parents	38%	54%
Single Parents	58%	61%
Young Parents	46%	32%
Did Not Complete High School	42%	25%
Other Adults	46%	60%
Anticipated Methods of Communication		
Memo	81%	85%
Telephone	89%	77%
Informally at School	81%	68%
Individual Conference	31%	55%

As shown in Table 5, the students in the mixed sophomore education law course reported that if they needed to contact a parent, it would most likely be through a memo or through a phone call (85%) rather than in an individual conference (35%). This may reveal some hidden fears of meeting with parents on a one-to-one basis or, perhaps, it is just a desire for expediency.

The students further reported that they predicted that parents who would most likely be involved in schools are those who have children in elementary school (96%) over those who had children in high school (34%). Parents who would be less likely to be involved would be those who are single parents (54%), young parents (42%), those who did not complete high school (38%), or those who are working two jobs (35%).

A similar survey administered to preservice secondary education teachers in their junior year showed varied results. The students reported that if they needed to contact a parent, they most likely would do so through a memo or a phone call (78%) rather than informally at school or through an individual conference (45%). The students further reported that they predicted that parents who would most likely be involved in schools are those who have child in elementary school (89%) over those who had children in high school (54%). Parents who would be less likely to be involved would be those who are single parents (61%), young parents (32%), or those who did not complete high school (25%).

Both the mixed group (with elementary, secondary, and special educaiton majors) and the secondary education group reported that parent involvement is not the answer to major school problems (27% and 32%, respectively). Furthermore, the preservice teachers perceive that parents do not have the training to be involved in school governance (39% and 35%, respectively). The interesting finding with the preservice teachers is that, even before these candidates enter the classroom, they report perceptions about which parents are most likely to be involved in their child's education. It is perhaps disheartening to note that preservice teachers are already forming a style of how they will communicate with parents. They tend to profile the same responses that practicing teachers prefer – a more formal setting or an impersonal memo.

Pulling Together the Common Threads

How can change in perceptions be made in this complex set of findings? Parents who respond to surveys tend to be white, long established in the district, and typically have elementary children in the program. Administrators typically complete the survey as a school rather than as an administrative team. One is left with the question – is this the voice of the administrative team? Teachers and clerical staff give little time to complete the survey and in some cases, no time at all. Preservice teachers already are developing fixed beliefs about which parent will more likely be involved even before they are awarded their license. Is parent involvement stuck in multiple perceptions and lack of interest?

The surveys were instrumental in raising awareness of areas that were not as positive – the perceptions that the staff (teachers and clerical) and principals did not value parent involvement highly. Each school was given the outcome of the multiple surveys as part of the fall faculty meeting, at a strategic time before the school improvement plans were to be submitted to the district. Did this make a difference? Did the school team look at the outcome of the surveys to see the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators about parent involvement in schools, especially as volunteers or as members of the school improvement team process? In most cases, change did not happen – yet.

The results are not all dismal. As a point of consideration, even the limited responses or imbalance in the responses shows that there is a start in this district to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how all the disparate groups define parent involvement. Baseline data provide a way to set a professional development agenda, and in this district, that is what has now happened. Since the survey was administered, the research team has met with parent groups, administrators, and teachers to discuss the findings. One area that appears to have some movement toward change is communication. Parents report that they feel comfortable in schools and that the office staff provides a friendly environment. Since the release of the study, teachers have considered in workshops how they are communicating with parents and also if there are ways for parents to communicate with teachers. One teacher realized that her newsletters had sentences that were too difficult for parents to understand. Another teacher found that she wrote a letter home introducing herself but now realizes it is also important for parents to write a letter back introducing their family – not just the student in the class.

The staff survey also provided negative responses about parent involvement such as "I don't think it is really my job or the district's job to teach parents how to parent correctly." Another wrote, "I believe our plates are already full as is, to not add on another program or responsibility, but to allow us the time to teach our students." Others thought parents should be required to spend a certain number of hours in the classroom volunteering. Negative comments strengthen the belief that parent involvement in schools is not well understood. If it is just another task to the countless lists of tasks, it will not be well received by those who have a limited set of strategies, time, and energy. Parent involvement needs to become a natural source of energy that helps the school community flourish. Tools evolved from these negative comments; teacher workshops in the next year used the comments by having teachers "debunk" each statement from a three-point perspective. Take for example the statement, "Parents don't care about what their child is learning in school." In workshops teachers were asked to look at this statement from three viewpoints – "I agree because…,"

"I disagree because…," and "A personal example of this is…." Ironically, when teachers were asked to take a three-sided perspective they tended to have a stronger stance on disagreeing with statements that were negative about parents and supported their beliefs with personal examples.

In the survey, the responses about what roles of involvement parents can serve in schools was as diverse as the responders. Administrators saw parents as tutors, while teachers saw parents as crossing guards or helping with lunchroom duties. Subsequent staff development at the schools have helped teachers broaden their understanding of parents as playing a role at home in helping with student organization or their work, listening to what the student learned in school, and making sure the student is ready for school and has homework completed.

What is not well understood at this time is that parents also are an essential part of school governance. When asked to rate the types of parent involvement preferred in schools, staff and administrators chose parents as volunteers to a much higher degree than parents as advocates or involved in decisions. There seems to be some gap in how parents perceive that they are willing to be involved and how others regard them as not willing to be involved.

A frequent observation often cited from the staff and administrators was a need for more professional development initiatives. It was also apparent that there is a lack of communication and understanding among school staff, teachers, and administrators about parent involvement goals as written in the School Improvement Plan. Preservice teachers also lack professional development exposure, especially if they have not taken a specific course or studied specific parent involvement modules provided in their teacher preparation coursework. Another group who received minimal staff development in parent involvement is administrators, who typically were not required to learn parent involvement strategies in their programs of study. Parents also have a need for training in how to be involved in school governance and how to play a supportive role in the school.

One of the powerful contributions of this study is that is was formulated on the previously cited six PTA standards that provide a structure for the perceptions of various groups. This helps the school district and the university work together with what is currently in place – both perceptually and visibly. The common types within the PTA standards were then used to design teacher workshops to raise teachers' awareness of parent involvement and to broaden their perspectives on how parent involvement in today's world looks different than it did in the generation in which they attended school. The standards also helped in clerical staff workshops in which "front office" staff were given time-efficient strategies to help collect parent data in a friendly and supportive

manner through forms that were written in simplified text and in multiple languages. Above all, the staff used role play to "get into the shoes" of parents and then used these insights to develop a more welcoming environment in the entrance and office of the school.

Breaking Perceptual Barriers

The first step in breaking perceptual barriers is gaining an understanding of the beliefs that are in place. The second step is to provide sufficient evidence to help dismantle teachers' perceptual barriers – the earlier in their preparation, the better. The final step is to bring parents closer to a school environment that works from a positive model of creative acceptance and away from a model of negativity. Can a broader vision be realized that creates a strong model that blends with teacher preparation, teacher education, parent education, and administrator preparation? Perhaps, assuming more adjustments are made in the perception of what effective parent involvement is.

Preservice teachers, teachers, and principals value parent involvement and acknowledge the connection between parent involvement and children's academic success, but it is not a high priority. Communication is important for all of those interviewed, but the template for understanding communication – the parent involvement plan – is not one that is frequently communicated to teachers and staff. It appears that there is a lack of understanding about what the strategic plan is; it also appears that only a few are involved in writing this plan. This, indeed, is a sad commentary on how schools continue to see parents as non-essential members of the school team.

A common theme with those involved in schools – principals, teachers, and clerical staff – is the crying need for professional development. Many of the staff rated their schools low in terms of offering parent involvement-related trainings or development opportunities. Many wrote that the school district should provide training opportunities on what constitutes effective parent involvement. It is time to move the spotlight off of parents and what they are not doing in terms of involvement and move the focus to what we – those in teacher preparation and those preparing in-service professional development – need to start doing in terms of parent involvement training. The workshops that are now being provided have been able to begin to disrupt perceptions that have been held by teachers. Teachers are asked to rewrite their definition of parent involvement three times during a workshop, and by the end, the analysis shows that teachers have broadened their understanding of parent involvement to activities beyond the classroom. That is only a start. In the future, it is hoped that the schools in the study will continue to "dig deeper" into what parent

involvement is – through team level discussion, book studies, and workshops that include parent and even grandparent participation.

One in-road is that preservice teacher education is essential if the teachers of tomorrow – be it the next semester or the next year – are to "hit the ground running" with an understanding of critical points of parent involvement. They need to understand that parents are interested in their child's education whether they are a single parent, a gay parent, a foster parent, a grandparent, or a traditional parent. Preservice teachers need to understand the six types of parent involvement and the opportunities for roles that parents can play in the home, in the school, and in the community.

Parents, too, need to become more vocal, especially in communities like the one in which this study took place. They need to become active members in parent councils, be a presence in schools, and help schools understand that they are not just volunteers but can be essential members on the various governance committees in the school and in the district. To become more inclusive, the IN of "involvement" needs to be all of us – administrators, teachers, office staff, and preservice teacher preparation institutions – as well as parents.

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Margaret Ferrara is an associate professor at the University of Nevada Reno with a research interest in family involvement. She writes articles on parent involvement and works with the local school district through a state-funded PIRC grant to provide administrator, teacher, parent, and preservice teacher workshops on multiple parent involvement topics. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Margaret M. Ferrara, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning, WRB 3100, MS 280, University of Nevada Reno, Reno, NV, 89557.

Book Review – *Welcome to the Aquarium: A Year in the Lives of Children* by Julie Diamond

Jean L. Konzal

Key Words: progressive education, kindergarten, classroom community, emergent curriculum, parent-teacher relationships, early childhood, learning

Is progressive education dead in this era of standards? Certainly not in Julie Diamond's classroom. This beautifully written narrative vividly brings to life the tapestry of children, activity, and teacher thinking that creates a progressive kindergarten classroom environment John Dewey (1938/1997) would appreciate. Intentionally designing a kindergarten that is based on her strong values and beliefs about how children learn, Julie Diamond shares with us the thinking that leads to her actions. Firmly rooted in progressive educational theory, she references, in addition to John Dewey, the writers who have most influenced her thinking: Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1986); Eleanore Duckworth (2005); Vivian Paley (1981, 2000); Susan Isaacs (1972); and Ruth Charney (2002).

Julie believes in children – in their ability to lead us to find the content, activities, and resources necessary to create a challenging and supportive kindergarten learning environment. Through careful observation of children, through thorough documentation, through a strong background in child development theory, through a deep knowledge of the world around her, through her own passion for art and teaching, and most importantly through the strength of her convictions, Julie is able to translate this foundational belief in children into effective practice.

Each of the book's chapters provides a detailed account of how she does this as she follows the ebb and flow of the school year. Julie's goal over the year is to

transform the individual children who enter her classroom in September into a tightly knit community where children feel ownership of the classroom and are excited about learning. To do this she watches and listens intently to each child as they make their way within the class. Each chapter of the book describes in detail how she does this.

Chapters one and two invite us into her kindergarten classroom in late August as she begins to set up her room and continues in September as she introduces the structures and routines that will be the foundation for learning throughout the year. We learn how everything that Julie does in her classroom is intentionally designed to provide children with a safe environment where they can grow into autonomous learners. The ritual of setting up her room gives her time to think about how children will live and learn in the room, and then she sets about creating an environment that will help children to do so in unobstructed ways. She wants the physical setup to be supportive of children's activities. She says, "I want the children to be able to read the environment, to find what they want, to know where to put things away" (p. 9).

The first weeks of school are spent with the goal of helping the children make the classroom their own by carefully teaching them about the room, about the materials in the room, and developing with the children the routines and structures that will support learning during the year. Julie does this in the context of purposeful activity. For instance, one of the first things she does with the children is to decide what signs are needed in the classroom and then have them make them, using whatever pictures and letters or words they can use.

Julie is an artist, and because she believes that it is important for teachers to share their intellectual and creative passions with their students, she places her description about the importance of art in her classroom next. In this third chapter she describes how art is central to her work with children and how it provides opportunities for all children to engage in creative meaning making.

Being open to what children bring to school – their way of seeing the world, the experiences they have had, their interests, their family relationships – is important to Julie. She builds a curriculum based on what she learns about them. Chapter four describes how curriculum is drawn from the children's interests and experiences, assuring that children will be fully engaged in the work. She says, "When a study begins with something that is already part of the children's world, their involvement can be immediate. One year when I taught first grade, the cardboard Halloween skeletons that appeared in late October sparked an interest in bones that resulted in weeks of study of human and animal bones" (p. 63). In this chapter she also addresses the issue of meeting state and local standards. How can an emergent curriculum such as she advocates also meet state and local state standards? Even though she believes it is an imposition on

teachers and children, she argues that creative and knowledgeable teachers can indeed address these standards within an emergent curriculum.

Chapters five and six explore the central place that literacy – oral language, reading, and writing – play in her classroom. Chapter five examines the importance of allowing children opportunities to talk with each other and to pose questions that interest them and give teachers a glimpse into how children understand the world. For example, one child posed this question: "Will a tree die if you pick a leaf?" (p. 88). Equally important is that the teacher listen intently to what the child says and take it seriously. It is through listening carefully to what children say that teachers gain insight into how children think. Chapter six describes how reading and writing are integral to all that goes on in her classroom. Reading and writing are used purposefully for communicating important ideas and information. Whether it is learning to recognize the names of their classmates, or writing signs for the classroom, or writing messages, or making lists of what they know about squirrels, or writing letters to relatives, if the children perceive the activity as authentic they will work hard to communicate their ideas and in the process learn to think of themselves as readers and writers.

Chapter seven illustrates the problems that all teachers experience as they work with children with multiple needs. Julie describes how, when confronted by difficult behavior, she first tries to understand the behavior from the child's point of view by asking probing questions related to what she already knows about the child. However, most striking about this chapter is the author's reflections on her own missteps. She says, "That is what teaching is, our continual looking at and asking questions about a child or children, and about ourselves, about something we did or didn't do. It is how we continually become professional – rather, become who we are in this profession" (p. 145).

Chapter eight is a case study of Henry, a child not easily liked. It pulls together all that Julie has reflected on in the previous chapters about observing and listening to children. It also provides insight into Julie's thinking about parent relationships. Her insights into working with parents are exceptionally thoughtful and a must read for all new and not-so-new teachers. She examines her own difficulty in withholding judgments about parents and recognizes that it is "all too easy to blame parents…and this is especially the case when parents and teachers don't start out with the same goals and values" (p. 163). She concludes, however, that it is the teacher's responsibility to listen intently to parents in order to understand how they understand their child and to work towards building common understandings with them.

Finally, chapters nine and ten are Julie's reflections on her life as a teacher. Readers of this book will not find any surprises here, since they emphasize how

her practices are fully congruent with her progressive ideals. She says, "it is the goal of progressive education: to not merely add to a child's accumulation of knowledge, but add to a child's ability to be a full human being" (p. 194). This was evident throughout the book. Julie intentionally created an inclusive classroom community where individual children could flourish. Her last reflections include a discussion about the personal characteristics that allowed her to persevere as a progressive educator in bureaucratic institutions that didn't necessarily share her values. She suggests that her "stubborn streak" and "oppositional nature" probably served her well in this effort.

All early childhood teachers, whether believers in progressive pedagogy or not, would benefit from reading this book. Julie Diamond provides the reader with a fascinating view into the mind of a remarkable teacher, one who is fully committed to getting to know each of her students in ways that will allow her to create a learning community to meet each of their needs. This book could easily be used in teacher education programs; each chapter addresses the essential issues of teacher education curricula – creating an inclusive community, curriculum development, literacy instruction, classroom management, parent-teacher relations.

Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century progressive education has come and gone and come back again under different names (such as constructivist pedagogy). But it has not had a lasting presence in a critical mass of schools. It has been suggested that the reason for this is that it requires extraordinary teachers. Progressive pedagogy has been misunderstood to mean teachers take a "laissez faire" attitude in the classroom, while in fact it is just the opposite. In this narrative, Julie describes how everything she does in the classroom is intentional. She is in charge, choosing when to share power with the children, when to intervene, when to allow a discussion to stray off topic. It is hard, intellectually challenging, and emotionally draining work. Too often progressive approaches have proven to be too challenging for teachers, leading to chaotic classrooms where little learning occurs. Whether for the lack of extraordinary teachers, or for the lack of administrative support, or for concerns that progressive education does not meet the needs of our culturally diverse population (Delpit, 1995), or for the national emphasis on standards and testing, progressive education is now in a decline. However, given our past history, it would not be a surprise to see it reborn again in the future. This book could be a valuable resource when that time comes.

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Jean L. Konzal is a professor emerita from The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). Currently as an adjunct for TCNJ she teaches students enrolled in the college's international teacher education programs. Her current interests include examining how culture impacts the way we understand the world. But most of all, she enjoys her newfound freedom to live life in the moment. Correspondence concerning this review may be addressed to konzal@tcnj.edu