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Chapter 6

Formation of partnerships: An ecological paradigm

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Introduction: Partnerships and the English context

In England a central government strategy for parental involvement in their children's schooling was first introduced close to the end of the last century through the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DfE 1997) and embodied in the subsequent Act of Parliament, the School Standards and Framework Act (1998). There were three key aims within this policy initiative: parents were to be provided with information, to be given a voice and to be encouraged to form partnerships with their children's education settings. These partnerships were formalised within a 'Home-School Agreement' which specified the:

- (a) school's aims and values;
- (b) school's responsibilities;
- (c) parental responsibilities; and
- (d) school's expectations of its pupils.

The emphasis was clearly on the school being the dominant partner in this relationship with parents being required to sign a declaration that they had taken note of the school's aims, values and responsibilities and acknowledged and accepted their responsibilities in relation to the school's expectations of its pupils.

In 2003, the Government commissioned a study to investigate the effects of such a strategy and it was found that the formation of effective partnerships can significantly improve children's achievements, their self-concept as learners and increase aspirations (Desforges

and Abouchaar, 2003). Since then working in partnership with parents has become an important running theme in policies and curricular reforms. In 2004, for example, as a part of reforms to ensure working effectively with parents, the government published funding proposals for childcare based on the recognition that parents have by far the biggest influence on children's lives and should be able to spend quality time with their children as part of 'the right work-life balance for them and their children' (HM Treasury, 2004: 2). Similarly, the introduction of a curriculum framework in England for early childhood in 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), stressed that partnerships with parents/carers were essential to support children's well-being and development. A subsequent government commissioned report, published in 2011, further emphasised the centrality of partnership to effective student learning, whilst also noting the 'agency of children' to be significant (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011: 86). This report once again emphasised the difference between parental 'involvement' and 'engagement', as first suggested by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), with the latter concept embracing more in the way of a proactive relationship with student learning.

Perhaps more importantly the report also recognised how outcomes could be improved if children become more engaged in their learning as this was seen to encourage parents to do the same (and *vice versa*). This appears to be the first recognition in England of the importance of a triangular approach to partnership which sought involvement, not just the school and parents, but one that also acknowledged the child as active learner and participant.

At about the same time the national inspection service, Ofsted, published a report into the relationships between schools and parents based on evidence of visits to 47 schools to evaluate how effectively partnerships had developed. Here they found the Home-School Agreements required by the 1998 Act to be having a low profile by this time and their impact on the day-to-day work between parents and the schools to be very limited (Ofsted, 2011). In the best cases, however, they saw the joint working between the home and the school was leading to much better outcomes for pupils, and where parents had contributed or initiated ideas for strategic improvement these ideas had been taken forward successfully.

Education in England during the early part of this century can thus be judged to have been concerned with how effective collaboration and partnerships with parents could be formed and sustained. Parental engagement was judged to require active collaboration and should be 'proactive rather than reactive, sensitive to the circumstances of all families, recognise the contributions parents can make and aim to empower parents' (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011: 10). Whilst there was some recognition of the need to involve students as an active

participant in the collaborative structures and processes that were recommended for partnerships, this was still a muted call at this stage.

Individual/group task

Reflective question: Before you read on, reflect on your work experience and discuss the relationships between staff in educational settings (managers, teachers, practitioners), children, parents and communities. What forms of communication do they use?

How do you rate their communication?

The evolving model of partnership

The dualistic and exclusive relationship between schools and students as learners can be seen to be being abandoned in terms of national policy initiatives, a pattern that can also be seen on the international stage, with a contemporaneous shift in perspective also being recognised within academic research. In addition to the changes in England highlighted above, the notion of partnerships in education has been embraced and embedded in curricula and policy documents from around the world. The governments of Australia, New Zealand and Sweden, for example, have all endorsed the importance of home-education connections and the impact for children’s well-being and achievements in their pre-school curriculum documents (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996; Swedish Government, 2010). Similarly, academic research outcomes stress that parental involvement is essential for a successful learning community and learners’ academic achievements (Wolfe, 2014). The conclusion drawn in a meta review into whether parental involvement interventions increase attainment was that school-led interventions ‘are most likely to succeed when they are aimed at young children, and involve parents and staff meeting regularly in an institution, with parental training, on-going support, and co-operative working with teachers’. (Gorard and Huat See, 2013: 4).

Much of the research focusing on partnerships has often been limited to an examination of the relationships between parents and formal education settings (e.g Goodall, 2013; Miller *et al.*, 2014). In undertaking an analysis of 378 articles reporting research on partnerships published nationally (Australia) and internationally Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) found, for example, that the partnerships between families and schools and other education settings are dominated by the constant othering of parental knowledge by staff. By this they mean the

implicit positioning by school-based staff to see people other than themselves as being of lesser importance in the development of student learning and enhanced outcomes. They categorise the ‘othering’ effect into three themes:

- **Parental knowledge is inadequate:** [Parents as actual or potential teachers]. Here, parents are seen as ignorant about what and how to teach their children and parent involvement programmes rectify this;
- **Parental knowledge is supplementary:** [Parents as collaborators]. Here, parents’ knowledge of their child allegedly complements staff’s professional knowledge, but in reality merely supplements it;
- **Parental knowledge is unimportant:** [Parents are absent]. Perhaps the simplest and most effective form of ‘othering’ – parents’ voices are absent from much of the literature about parent involvement (242).

These findings seem to reflect those of a much earlier study which suggested that partnership is like the spokes on a wheel where parents were perceived in a variety of alternative ways: as an audience, as direct and active teachers of their children at home, as volunteers within and outside the classroom, serving as unpaid employees or as decision makers (Gordon, 1970). Since then others have examined the parental involvement paradigm and three models depicting parent roles were presented by Swap (1993).

- The **Protective Model** which separates the functions of school and home with parents delegating and holding schools responsible for the education of their children;
- The **School-to-Home Transmission Model** holds parents accountable for supporting teachers in their efforts to educate children. Supportive activities are outlined by schools and include fund raising, reinforcing school expectations at home, supporting school parties and providing a home environment that nurtures school success;
- The **Curriculum Enrichment Model** supports the partnership approach to parent involvement with parents and educators working together.

Since then many studies have examined the development of partnerships that were focused on parenting styles and their relationships with school (Goodall, 2013) and linking parental involvement with children’s learning and school success (Goodall and Montgomery, 2013; Miller *et al.*, 2014). This paradigm is characterised as a ‘binary relationship with an ‘other’ i.e. ‘with something else that it is not’ (Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000: 242). In the context of formal educational settings this paradigm of partnership has thus tended to be one-way

communication when parents are provided with suggestions and expectations, are expected to behave in a way that it is oriented by the school and act according to school's culture and criteria in sameness rather than valuing diversity (Christenson, *et al.*, 2009). This way of partnership and indeed family participation is described as a 'top-down approach' (Ruddock *et al.*, 2000) which notably fails to address parental expectations, perceptions and priorities related to their involvement (Souto-Manning and Swick, 2006). Such an approach also fails to recognise educators adhering to the prevailing family involvement paradigm and impedes a full and valid view of the family as a partner.

Consequently, researchers turned their attention to the Empowerment Paradigm of Examining Partnerships, an approach which recognised and amplified the role that could be played by parents, families, children and significant others in terms of student learning and outcomes. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) developed a six-element empowerment paradigm for parent and family involvement including practices that:

1. focus on family and child strengths;
2. include, validate and engage families;
3. recognise and value multiple forms of involvement;
4. provide lifelong learning for teachers, children, and families;
5. build trust through collaboration; and
6. reflect linguistic and cultural appreciation, recognition, and responsiveness.

Latter research thus seems to be concerned with examining the benefits and barriers of effective partnerships in order to identify key characteristics and develop best practices (Christenson *et al.*, 2009; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Such research has focused on the examination of the influences that shape relationships between families, school and children and suggested that effective partnerships are actually best achieved through a triangle of relationships based on respect, listening to each other and active cooperation and participation (Thorton and Burton, 2007). Outcomes from this body of research consistently recognise that effective partnerships include the child (Ruddock, *et al.*, 2000; Souto-Manning and Swick, 2006), are consistent and reciprocal (Halgunseth *et al.*, 2009) and responsive to the 'language spoken by the family' (Halgunseth *et al.*, 2009: 56).

Consequently, for effective partnerships the requirements are shared decision-making, mutual respect, equality, dignity, trust and honesty, commitment by all parties, understanding each other circumstances and open communication (Madsen, 2009).

This was confirmed in a later study which examined family-centred practice model in the formation of partnerships in Australia and concluded that effective partnerships require staff in education to ‘assist families to be empowered and respected decision makers’ (Rouse, 2012: 21). Rouse did acknowledge, however, that although empowerment is a key element of family-centred practice, ‘not all [...] educators are equally positioned to empower families or, in fact, even demonstrate empowerment in some of the relationships they have with the families of children in their care’ (22). Reviews of research and published literature commissioned by the UK government on the relationship between schools and parental involvement, support and family education on pupil achievement had previously recognised similar conclusions, but had indicated a need to recognise a difference between ‘parental involvement’ and ‘parental engagement’. One of the authors of such reviews later concluded that the process of partnership had been understood in a very narrow sense of ‘parental involvement with children’s schooling’ rather than the more useful concept of ‘parental engagement with children’s learning’ (Goodall, 2013: 134). Parental involvement, Goodall suggested, is related to school-initiated activities which have as their focus parental interaction with the school, rather than with the learning of the child and is measured by parental presence rather than by student outcome or effect. Such activities may form part of the entire process of parental involvement in children’s learning, she argued, but they are only a small section rather than the whole of the concept. The two UK government commissioned reviews of research had made it clear that the greatest lever for children’s achievement is parental *engagement* in their learning and the atmosphere towards learning in the home (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). What we are able to conclude, therefore, is that parental engagement with their children’s learning is central when seeking to enhance attainment and achievement at all levels of their development. At all ages what matters is ‘the overall attitude towards parenting and children, and the actions that then flow from that attitude, in combination with each other’ (Goodall, 2013: 137). Parental interest in terms of expectations, encouragement and support are vital, therefore, and this holds good regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status throughout schooling (Catsambis, 2001).

Partnership is a term that since the early 1990s can thus be considered to have become ‘imbued with a global sense of virtue’ (Fullan and Hargeaves, 1992: 63) with our examination of relevant research on the discourse of partnerships suggesting there are three dominant paradigms. Firstly, the dualistic view of partnerships between parents-families and

school, secondly the triangular approach to partnerships that includes the school/educational setting, parents/family and children and thirdly, the empowerment paradigm of partnership.

Individual/group task

Reflect on the definition of partnership below and discuss:

1. What might be effective ways of sharing information among all the stakeholders?
2. What might be effective ways of communicating among all the stakeholders?

We propose as a definition of partnerships that aim to build a connected network where the nucleus is effective relationships between parents, community, school and students and where all participate in the creation of learning environments that are meaningful, diverse, responsive to the evolving demands of the society and actively engaged in the learning process (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

Towards the empowerment of parents and families

In partnerships paradigms the notion of “sameness” or “universality” of partnerships (all families are the same and should have the same expectations assumes all families, communities expect the same from education) has been dominant and has failed to recognise difference, which endangers the potential for positive contributions that represent the diversity of relationships that communities and families can bring to the relationship (Keen, 2007; Rouse, 2012). Countering such approaches is central to the empowerment paradigm which offers a welcoming approach to the family, and notably parents, and to the incorporation of their voices in the school life such as planning and evaluating their presence within the physical structure of the school (Christensen *et al.*, 2009). The consensus is that this paradigm had been overlooked with partnerships with parents and family having been primarily managed by the school which typically ignored the social positioning of the parents and the different socio-economic and educational levels of the families (Levin-Rasky, 2009; Graue and Sherfinski, 2011). Thus researchers added to the empowerment paradigm the notion of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to examine the different ways families engage with school life and their children’s education (Graue and Sherfinski, 2011). Through the concept of cultural capital they sought to explain the formation of partnerships and ‘its focus on how structures and institutions play as part in producing inequality in home-school relationships and children’s academic success’ (Miller *et al.*, 2014: 331). The

acknowledgment of the sociocultural context and the social positioning of parents thus led researchers to re-examine the roles within the development of partnerships to recognise that:

Every time parents and teachers encounter one another in the school setting, their conversations are shaped by their own autobiographical stories and by broader cultural and historical narratives that inform their identities, their values and their sense of place in the world. (Lightfoot 2003, 3).

Building upon this the work of Epstein (1995, 2001) shifted the discourse on partnerships and extended it in the development of partnerships from a critical perspective by describing six types of family/school/community:

- parenting partnerships where the focus is on support to families to create home environments to support children as students;
- forms of communication for school to home and home to school;
- volunteering;
- information exchange between home and school so students can be supported in learning at home with homework;
- decision making partnerships where parents are included; and
- partnerships with the community where resources and services from the community are integrated in the school life to support students' learning and development.

To sum up at this stage, although the concepts of parental engagement and their empowerment are illuminative and do illustrate their centrality in the development of student learning and outcomes, this is still only part of the picture, for which further discourse is needed. Key factors such as the environment still need to be factored into the process if partnerships are to be as effective as possible. Hence we considered an ecological paradigm to address some of these issues.

Individual/group task

Reflect on what you have read so far and consider the barriers to effective partnerships. From your experience so far from educational contexts are there any families that might be at risk of being excluded from the school's outreach activities to parents? Why?

The discourse of partnerships: Towards an ecological paradigm

Schools do not exist in a vacuum and have the potential to be shaped by local as well as wider societal influences, including national governments. It also needs to be acknowledged that schools are concerned with complex social phenomena that are multi-factorial and multi-layered in nature which go beyond teaching and learning and there is a direct causality with environmental factors that impact on the way partnerships are formed. Relevant and contemporary literature focusing on the development and formation of partnerships indicate that collaboration between school and families should be based on communication, trust, acceptance and shared values and an appreciation of difference and diversity of families and schools (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

From our research, explained later in the detailed Case Study, we propose that the following elements listed below should be recognised in effective partnerships:

Required elements on the formation of partnerships

- Shared values and beliefs so all can engage and participate in the creation of the learning environment. However, we do not propose that families and teachers should hold identical values and expectations, but together to set common values and expectations;
- A proximity/nearness meaning of community - parents and students to come physically together often as possible;
- Willingness;
- Trust;
- Shared responsibility;
- Avoidance of blame culture;
- Avoidance of stereotypic views of people, events, conditions or actions;
- Avoidance of labelling culture;
- Aspirations;
- Resilience as the ability to adapt successfully to situation and circumstance;
- Commitment;
- Altruism;
- Empathy;
- Inclusion;
- Reciprocity;
- Complementarity of needs (cognitive, social, emotional).

As has been demonstrated above, however, much of the discussion of partnerships has often been limited to parents and school and ignores how the community forms the values, beliefs and identities of parents and learners that influence the learning process. We argue, therefore, that the discussion on partnerships should start from the premise that families, learners, community and school should all be involved in the creation of learning environments and collaborate in meaningful ways to create educational experiences that will be beneficial to all involved in the process.

Effective education settings are those which have developed productive and synergistic relationships between learners, families, the team and the community, because the context, the locality and the culture in which learners live are vitally important (Male and Palaiologou, 2012: 112).

The ‘equitable dialogue between families and schools’ (Miller *et al.*, 2014: 341) thus needs to be extended beyond simple home-school connections and be approached from an ecological paradigm. It is important before we explain this to define what is meant by ‘ecological paradigm’. Although the term paradigm is widely used in research and is related to the “set of values and beliefs shared by a scientific society” (Ma 2016:25), in our work it is used in that sense to describe any number of reciprocal relationships and activities that are shaped by efforts towards common goals whereby all stakeholders are equally engaged to form partnership as an interactive process. Although Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 2005) work on the bio-ecological paradigm (see Chapter 1 for a detailed explanation of his theory) highlights that families are influenced by their environment and this impacts on children’s development and learning, we extend this to the impact of systems theory that underpins his theory. Jarvis (1998) stressed that systems exist when there are multi layered elements that are interacting. Through the lenses of systems theory social psychologists approached social phenomena and interacting social groups to consider them as a system. Applying this to partnerships between the school, the families and the community the nature of the relationships indicate complexity, non-linearity and non-predictability which are influenced by a variety of interrelated and interwoven factors. Systems theory is not concerned with the construction of models that can be applied in all contexts. Instead, the focus is on entities and their complexities and supports the idea that systems are not fragmented (unlike models) and all interwoven factors that involved in formation of partnerships are interacting in a continual

manner. In that sense the specific context of partnerships determines a system of compartmentalised, context specific, relationships between the stakeholders which connects them as a whole and attempts to establish continuity in understanding the rituals and values of this context.

More specifically, in any environment values, beliefs and identities are formed and are inherent within families and children. Schools are also part of the environment and that means either they understand the sociocultural context, expectations and effective interactions with families because they are part of this or need to come to such an understanding in order to create a ‘shared commitment and responsibility’ between school, families, learners and communities (Giovacco-Johnson 2009, 128). In that sense partnerships should be approached from an ecological perspective where ‘learning and development of children is essential in forming partnerships and where strengths, perceptions, and priorities can be seen as complementary rather than conflicting’ (Giovacco-Johnson, 2009: 128). This leads us to conclude that an ethical approach is required:

[...] that respects values and does not engage in any project that will only benefit the individual, but instead looks after the ecology of the community [because] the creation of learning environments in which the centrality of interactions and relationships among learners, teachers, family and community (i.e. their values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and economic circumstances) interact with external elements (such as the global economy, climate and social phenomena that additionally influence the life of the community) in order to jointly construct knowledge (Male and Palaiologou, 2015: 219).

Thus we propose that partnerships should be approached from an ecological perspective that represents a way ‘to read and corroborate the importance of developing good relationships’ (Migliorini *et al.*, 2016: 167). The ecological paradigm is concerned with the examination of partnership as a complex social phenomenon while taking into account multiple behaviours, multiple views, non-predictable actions and all key elements for effective relationships that are interrelated, interdependent and interconnected in a non-linear way. When partnerships are developed through the ecological paradigm they become a connected network where the nucleus is effective relationships between parents, community, school and students. It is an approach where all participate in the creation of learning environments that are meaningful,

diverse, responsive to the evolving demands of the society and actively engaged in the learning process (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

We argue that partnership is a complex phenomenon and a process, not an event. As such it requires an in-depth understanding of causality and processual aspects such as knowledge, skills, understanding values, attitudes and a holistic desire to share responsibilities of home, educational settings, communities which can lead to effective mutual actions that assist the learning environment.

Thus we propose that the study of partnerships requires an ecological ontology which seeks an in-depth investigation of the complexity of partnerships and there is the need for this approach to be

extended further to also include the community in order to form effective multi-modal relationships [...] partnerships between communities, parents, students and schools need to be approached as a holistic dynamic where relationships are shaped as much by the local culture, values and ethos as well as external influences such as government agendas or policies' (Male and Palaiologou 2016: 153).

Case Study: The typology of partnerships

In response to the above discussion we undertook research that aimed to approach the formation of partnerships from an ecological perspective and to:

1. Explore the views of the relationships between staff in educational settings and children, parents and communities;
2. Examine how these relationships are formed;
3. Investigate how (if) partnerships are sustained.

This study employed qualitative methodology in twelve educational settings in England where we interviewed all stakeholders (families, children, people from the local community and school staff) and content analysis of press cuttings that focused on the schools. We found that formation of partnership depends on the conditions in which community, parents, school and students are interacting (social context, structures and organisation) and they are contingent on and depend on the way interactions are accomplished towards a common goal.

Using ecological lenses as explained above, data revealed that for effective partnerships that are encouraging multi-modal, multi-layer and multi-factional communication between all

stakeholders are the ones who are open to, and interact with, all stakeholders and are resulting in continual evolution rather than reducing them to the properties and values of the school only.

“It is not effective if we tell them (parents) what they must do, it is about understanding what they want as well and telling us[...] otherwise there is no point” (Headteacher).

Interviews with children, parents, community and staff of these settings revealed the influential factors that each stakeholder values when in communication with the educational setting:

Parents valued:

- Acceptance
- Understanding of their goals, cultural values, experiences
- Support

Community valued

- Safety
- Outreach activities
- Economical value for the locality
- Reputation

Children valued:

- Involvement
- Presence of family
- Approachable staff
- Awareness/familiarity of family structures, norms, habits

Staff valued:

- Willingness
- Cooperation
- Trust
- Communication
- Parental knowledge

In the light of the interview data we concluded that the influential factors for effective partnerships are based on:

- ongoing communication and not only when there was a crisis or an issue;
- ongoing sharing of information;
- the flow of power and empowerment meaning that all stakeholders believed that and enhanced the principle that *learning happens at home , in the community and at school;*
- advocacy, (the desire to improve the quality of life and promote overall welfare);
- mutual respect between families’, educational settings’ and community’s culture;
- connectedness and responsiveness to the values and expectations of all stakeholders.
- emphasis on the role of leadership as orchestrator;
- clear commitment to developing partnerships and holistic involvement (all stakeholders, learners, families, school, community such as local business);
- use of positive communication about students’ school performance and productivity;
- Avoidance of stereotypes at all levels (family’s norms, students’ performances and community’s norms);
- Believing and not doubting the abilities of families and the local community;
- Investment of time and funding for outreach activities;
- Negotiating situations rather than engaging in conflict.

Finally, we found that there are five strands of partnerships as illustrated in table one below. The first four types include two-way connections and reflect the dualistic approaches to partnerships which is school-parents. However, the last one: Dynamic/Ecological includes multiple ways of establishing connections for which the core element is shared responsibilities between home, educational settings and community reflecting a “holism” desire to identify common goals for the learning environment and joint decisions at all levels.

Forms of partnerships	Characteristics	Outcomes	Level of interaction
Malleable	• Diffused responsibility	De-individuation	Anonymous

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced capacity for rational explanations • Impulsive behaviour • Blame culture • Apathy 		
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obedience to authority, antagonism, dominance of opinion/s • Ambiguity • Anti-inception 	Destructive Exclusion	Authoritarian Emphasis of power of the dominant culture –school
Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation • Ritualistic • Anti-inception - no tolerance for difference • Relative deprivation: a gap of what we have done and what should do • Ambiguous situations 	De-penetration (deliberately reduce disclosure of information) Destructive	Obedience Bystanders (Stakeholders have bystanders’ attitudes; they are likely to participate if they feel they have relevant skills)
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocity • Mutualism • Emphasis on acceptance 	Conformity Perceived quality	Satisfactory Direct private influence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational exchange from school • Reactive 		
Dynamic-Ecological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common goals • Consolidation • Investment • Reciprocity • Complementarity of needs • Strategic • Empathy • Altruism • Proactive 	Effective Maintained Identification Consistency Loyalty Developmental	Public influence

Table 1 Typology of partnerships

Conclusions-Implications

Having examined partnerships through the ecological lens, defined earlier as a connected network where the nucleus is effective relationships, this led us to conclude that analysis is needed at different levels. The following can become reflective points where the degree for effective and successful partnerships can be assessed:

- *Structural*: underlying issues that impact on the structure of the partnership (such as poverty, multi ethnicities, policy);
- *Contextual*: creation of a diverse environment where shared values and beliefs are negotiated towards the creation of a common culture;
- *Spatial-Organisational*: the physical nearness and how this is achieved to share information and exchange ideas to meet reciprocity and in-depth understanding of complementarity of needs of all stakeholders;

- *Interactional*: examination of individual and collective interactions, behaviours in the localised social context;
- *Leader position power*: focusing on social exchange relationships in which partnership is dependent upon;
- *Responsiveness*: a critical consciousness to reflect/challenge/develop/maintain /sustain participation of communities, parents, students and school;
- *Advocacy*: cooperative actions that strive to enrich the lives of children, families, community and staff including challenging injustices and promoting overall welfare.

Consequently, an ecological paradigm of forming and sustaining partnerships should and act on the:

Sources of influence focusing on the human elements such as:

- Ensuring the setting has a clear understanding of the needs and expectations of the local community and families;
- Undertaking analyses of how the setting and its representatives engage with the community, parents and children when seeking effective relationships.

Nature of influences focusing on the contextual elements such as:

- Having clarity of vision and expectations that are shared and based on reciprocity of needs;
- Being adaptable with their leadership behaviour according to context.

Summary Points

- Education is an important time for all children and equally important for their families. It is pivotal that educational settings are working in harmony and effectively together with the parents and local community.
- Partnerships in education have been the subject of government policies that actively promoted the partnerships with parents and educational settings.
- Most of the literature and published research approach partnerships as a dualistic relationships between the parents and the educational settings.
- Influential models of partnerships are:
 - Spokes on a wheel (Ian Gordon 1970)

- Three models depicting parent roles (Swap, 1993)
- A six-element empowerment paradigm for parent and family involvement (Souto-Manning and Swick, 2006)
- Family-Centred Practice (Rouse 2012)
- Six point model (Goodall 2013)
- Six types of involvement school-family-community partnerships (Epstein 1997)
- We argue, however, that partnerships should be based on an ecological paradigm and examined as a complex social phenomenon where parents, learners, educational settings and community become a dynamic network.;
- This paradigm is the approach takes into account multiple behaviours, multiple views, non-predictable actions that are interrelated, interdependent and interconnected in a non-linear way.

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