

CHAPTER 8

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES WITH ACTION RESEARCH:
A MULTINATIONAL STUDY OF
SCHOOL–FAMILY–COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**

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Introduction

When it began in 1990 with funds from the U.S. Department of Education, the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning established an International Network of Scholars as a forum of researchers around the world who were studying various aspects of the topic. The Center sponsored an informal journal, *Unidad*, and International Roundtables in the U.S.A. and Europe to promote exchange of ideas and research plans. Out of these exchanges, the idea for a multinational action research project grew.

The multinational study, which began in 1992 and involved more than 40 researchers in eight projects in five countries (Australia, Chile, The Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain), is based on the conceptual framework of the Center which views the inter-institutional connections of the school, family, and community as a set of overlapping spheres of influence on children's learning and environment. One of the projects completed two years of work in the field and was not able to complete a written case study in time for inclusion in this special issue of IJER.

Funding

There were multiple sources of financial support: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement; Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) grants from the Charles T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the participating institutions in the five countries. Each project received a small discretionary grant from IRE of \$1,000 to \$4,000 for activities in the schools and some travel costs.

Research Questions

There were three main research questions:

- (1) What parent and community involvement projects and strategies do schools choose? What processes and procedures did they use?
- (2) What are the effects of specific strategies on children's learning and educator and family attitudes and behavior?
- (3) What kinds of policies and practices help or hinder parent–community–school collaboration?

We also wanted to develop and test a variety of action-research methodologies in diverse settings. In three of the countries — Czech Republic, Spain, and Portugal — there had been little or no previous school-based action research.

Procedures

The outside researcher(s) or facilitator(s) approached the school or schools to determine their interest and capacity and enlist their participation. Each school agreed to become a member of IRE's international League of Schools Reaching Out. The League is a network of about 80 schools in the U.S.A. selected because they were seriously developing new approaches to collaboration with the families and communities they served.

The planning and conduct of the work in each school varied considerably. In three cases the researcher designed the study in consultation with school administrators and teachers. In the other sites the facilitator used a team approach in which both teachers and parents were involved. All of the researchers from eight sites met with the principal investigators in Portugal in November 1994 at the conclusion of the work in the schools to report and discuss their findings and discuss common themes. The researchers in each site prepared a case study summarizing the process and the results. Condensed versions of these case studies appear in the next section of this chapter.

Common Elements

The reader will note in the brief cases which follow that there were common elements in the sites: (1) all were based in elementary schools and involved direct continuing collaboration with a university, teacher training institution, or research organization and one or two schools; (2) there is an introduction of at least one intervention to promote family or community partnerships with careful documentation of effects of intervention on one or more of the following outcomes: parents' and teachers' attitudes and behavior, school climate, and children's learning; (3) there is a collaborative approach to the work; (4) common survey instruments are used, including a survey of family and educator attitudes and behavior and a measure of school climate. Other instruments, developed by and for each participating school, include interviews, questionnaires, and economic and cultural diagnoses of the school's community and policy context.

Seven Case Studies

The case descriptions which follow are based on much longer case studies which will be included in the report on the multinational study to be published by the Center on Families.

Partnerships in a Czech School

In the following case, "Building School – Family – Community Partnerships in the Process of Social Transition in the Czech Republic", Eliška Walterová presents her action-research results from the Czech Republic.

In 1989, the "velvet revolution" which overthrew the Communist government influenced educational policy in the Czech Republic. The political and social transition had an impact on educational ideology, and created the potential for establishing private and alternative schools; introduced legislative measures for the decentralization of the school system; and supported more school autonomy and educational diversity. Parents were formally given more freedom in school choice, more responsibility for their children's education, and more opportunities to influence school life. However, partnerships of school–family–community were not considered a priority of educational transition. The changes helped to activate some groups or schools. But, the traditional "divorce" between school and families continued.

This was the context for our action-research project started in 1992. The school where the project was developed is in a housing project in Prague with 650 pupils, aged six to 15.

Purposes and Methodology

The main problems and research questions emerged from real situations in the school: How to overcome school–family separation, how to overcome parent distrust of school and teachers; how to support an atmosphere for pupils' engaged learning.

The project had three aims: (1) improvement of school climate and learning conditions; (2) two-way communication and cooperation between home and school; and (3) building contacts with the local community.

The main features of the project methodology were interventions in the reality of school practices and careful evaluation of the results. We used four research strategies — mirroring, exploring, monitoring and tuning.

Project Stages

In the first stage a non-traditional research team was established involving a school administrator, parents' club committee members, and the researcher. The team's first questions were: Who is who? How do we (teachers, parents, pupils) see the school? What we want? What we each expect from the others? Questionnaires, interviews, discussions, observations, and other techniques were then used to obtain answers.

In the second stage the project concentrated on intervention. New forms of cooperation were developed and contacts with a local community were initiated, making the community more aware of the school. Then whole-school events were planned and carried out with positive results. The following activities and events were accomplished:

- regular meetings of the parent's club with the school management and class representatives;
- parent–teacher meetings and individual consultations;
- parent–teacher workshops;
- lecturers and consultations with specialists (psychologist, educationists, jurists, pediatricians, sexologist);
- establishment of the School Foundation to support financially some school activities;
- discussions with local media representatives;
- a school bulletin for communication;
- an experiment with a teacher–child–parent agreement in first grade;
- parents' financial help for socially handicapped pupils, equipment, computers, and special awards for pupils.

In the final year of the project, it was possible to organize events to bring the entire school community together which led to an improved climate, understanding, and communication. Parents were stimulated by the success of the Christmas Party to organize a year-end event — “Camp Fire in the School Yard”. This highly successful event documented changing attitudes, atmosphere, and growing partnerships.

Parents, teachers, and pupils worked together on the event. Planning meetings were a forum for positive encounters, lessons in democracy, and the development of a spirit of partnership.

Results

Changes were noted in parents' and children's attitudes towards the school. Initial criticism and disenchantment about the school were decreased. Parents started to understand the school better and to contact teachers more often. Teachers, who at first were reserved about the idea of partnerships with families, came to evaluate positively the changes that occurred and reported that they appreciated the cooperation with parents. Some developed a more nuanced understanding of teacher professionalism.

Children were the most influenced group. They reflected the more lively and dynamic atmosphere of the school and reacted very enthusiastically to the improved school climate. In addition, parents and teachers reported that children's behavior improved.

The school stepped away from uniformity and anonymity and became better known and more popular in the district. The most important achievement was the restoration of the human dimension, which had been extinguished in Czech schools during the totalitarian regime.

The project's success was due to the trust and cooperative relationships which developed, together with the strong support for the project of the school management and the parents' club.

The lasting results include a growing interest by parents in school problems and in their children's learning, and the establishment of new mechanisms of contact and communication between the school and families. Project participants believe that a new tradition has started.

Lessons from the Czech Project

New partnerships must be stimulated by the school. A parents' club is a good start, but not enough to involve all parents. Good communication and the exchange of information are good starting points to build partnerships. Involving children is very important for bridging the school-family "divorce".

New forms of cooperation between school and parents in common events are excellent lessons of democracy for children; parents should be helped by the school to understand their rights as well as their duties and responsibilities for their children's education. Educators and parents have to admit problems and face them together. Examples of good school-family-community partnerships will improve overall educational policy.

Action Research in Spain

Action research in Spain is discussed in "Building Parent - Teacher Partnerships in Spain", by Raquel-Amaya Martínez Gonzalez.

Spain has experienced great social changes in the last two decades. One of the most evident social achievements that results from these changes has been in education. The latest one, called Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE), which appeared on 3 October, 1990, is still being implemented. One of its objectives is to promote cooperation between parents and school staff in order to increase the quality of children's education. However, no evident changes have been shown yet in the kind of partnership and practices that schools used to maintain with parents. Parents' Associations at schools and parents' participation in the

School Council are still the main activities parents perform in the context of the schools. These are important areas of involvement, but it could be said that they do not always represent a real and friendly partnership.

One recent effort to implement the new law was a project described in this chapter, undertaken at Laviada School. This project saw parents, teachers, students, and representatives from Oviedo University sit together in the school for the first time to discuss parent-teacher cooperation, and to organize activities to improve it.

The School

Laviada School is in a central area of Gijón, an industrial city on the north coast of Spain. Families who send their children to Laviada School have, on average, a medium economic level, which is consistent with the level of education parents have: 40% primary education, 41% secondary, and 19% university education. The school serves a middle-class community. Most of the children are Spanish, but there are a few of Asian background whose parents run restaurants in the area. Most students live with both parents.

The school covers eight grades (five of primary education and three of compulsory secondary education), plus kindergarten. The enrollment for the 1992-93 academic year, in which this study began, was 813 pupils. School organization is good, and teachers, in general, are receptive to develop innovative programs. There are 38 teachers, most of them women. The male principal, the secretary, and the school organizer form the managing school board. All three have been interested in developing the project, and the principal and the school organizer played an active role by being part of the action-research team formed to undertake the study. Their presence and interest were key to the project's success.

Purposes and Methodology

The study followed a cooperative action-research methodology. It is framed in an environment where some changes are wanted (the school) and performed by those who are directly involved in it (teachers, parents, and students) in cooperation with a university researcher. The researcher was the facilitator and helped the team analyze and promote parent-teacher partnerships at school in order to increase knowledge about the processes involved in building cooperation and to improve the quality of the school and children's education.

This two-year study had two main aims: cooperative needs assessment and intervention. School cooperation needs were assessed during the first year.

The most relevant needs and demands identified were as follows:

- (1) From parents and teachers: (a) need to talk more about their respective educative objectives for children and agree about priorities; (b) need to meet more often to plan ways to help solve student problems; (c) need to meet more often to talk about children's positive behavior; (d) need to learn effective ways to improve parent-child relations and help children develop thinking and study skills.
- (2) From students: (a) teachers should care more about their personal lives and circumstances; and (b) parents should meet more often with teachers.

The second year was characterized by certain interventions to meet some of the needs. The

Systematic Training for Effective Parents program (STEP), by Dinkmeyer and McKay, was implemented to inform parents about strategies to improve parent–children interaction. The 12 parents who participated in the program agreed they had learned much from it and soon improved their relationship with their children. Another project to inform parents and their children about study skills was tried. All parents who took part reported it to be useful and asked that it be repeated the following academic year.

Contributions to the School

A more positive attitude towards parents by teachers and towards teachers by parents was observed. Many parents came to understand that teachers and other parents are willing to help them. Teachers came to realize that parents really appreciate their help, which motivated them to organize activities for them.

Some parents learned to lead groups of parents, which gave them pride because they did not think they had such skills. Through taking part in the project more parents became interested in future activities and in helping to organize them. Teachers became more willing to organize activities to increase communication with families.

The main objectives of the project were achieved. The best proof of this is that the parents and teachers wanted to continue working in this field. In the following school year teachers and parents engaged in a project to help both parents and children increase their self-esteem.

Limitations

The dependence of the team on the facilitator was a weak point. Progress made toward the partnership idea may be lost when the facilitator stops working in the team. It is also not predicted that the work in the school concerned will have an impact on other schools in the region or the country.

Parent–teacher partnerships are hard to develop, and some may feel that the heavy investment of time and energy may not always be worth the effort.

A Clash of Culture in Portugal

Pedro Silva and Ricardo Vieira report on a complex two-year project in a small school in Portugal in, “A Dialog Between Cultures: A Report of School–Family Relationships in Pinhal do Rei Elementary School”.

The School

The Pinhal do Rei Elementary School (grades 1 through 4), is a public school of 74 students and four female teachers, with three classrooms on two floors. The school is located in the suburbs of the city of Leiria, in the central coastal area of Portugal, an area in which old agricultural fields, small businesses, considerable industry, and the service sector mingle. Among

the families, factory work is the most common profession of both mothers and fathers, followed by a smaller group of merchants, and a number of homemakers. The majority of parents have only a fourth-grade education. Just two fathers and three mothers had gained a bachelor's degree from among a group of about 150 parents.

Purposes

The project had the following aims:

- to create a brief sociocultural portrait of the families;
- to identify the families most reluctant to visit the school;
- to assess the strategies already being used and identify, together with the teachers and members of the Parents' Association (PA), alternative strategies which would stimulate these families to visit the school.

We intended this project to be as close to an action-research methodology as possible. The action-research group consisted of teachers, members of the school PA, and two researchers, both teachers at a public teachers' college: Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico de Leiria.

Parent and Teacher Cultures

A concept of culture was used to gain knowledge about each of the "actors". The heterogeneity of the families was reflected in their attitudes towards life and school. The majority of them regarded with skepticism the invitation to become involved in school affairs since, in their recollection, parents went to the school only when they were summoned, if there were discipline problems with their children. Suddenly, it was necessary for them to look at the school's mission of teaching, and the family's role in education, beyond their previous experiences.

From this socially and culturally diverse whole, a smaller group of parents came forward, by virtue of being closer to the school's ideology and practice, to form the PA. The majority of parents, those closer to the median culture of total parent body, usually stayed home in the evening watching television while meetings took place at school to plan the direction of their children's education. The PA evolved from a group formed and animated by a teacher with the goal of developing informal activities together into a group which searched avidly to build its own identity and to gain legitimate social status.

All the teachers were female with years of experience, but they did not hold uniform views about the usefulness of school-family involvement or priorities in school curricula.

During the two years of the project we witnessed a clash between the social representations which underlay the discourse and many of the ideas expressed in teacher meetings or meetings between teachers and the PA.

Interventions

Two types of activities occurred concurrently. Formal activities included meetings traditionally scheduled by teachers in the evenings. In the second year, the PA started to request these meetings, with an agenda negotiated between the school director and the PA president.

Informal or non-formal activities include social activities such as the traditional Christmas and New Year's parties, Carnival, and musical performances. These activities were generally well received by the parents and the community. At these celebrations, food and drinks were always provided by the PA, providing one way to raise funds for other activities.

Project Phases

In the first phase, corresponding to the pre-history of the PA and immediately post-formation, the school–family relationship took a unilateral form; parents were expected to help in the school in various ways, such as improving the facilities and helping with celebrations. Even in this period, however, some initiatives of the PA were supported by the teachers, and vice versa.

In a second phase, after the PA was legally constituted and its directorship was changed, there was a team that wished to go further. Because they were knowledgeable about the realities of their school and the legislation which governs it (the president of the board of directors and the president of the general assembly are teachers and close to the academic culture) they demanded their own space in the school, because the law prescribes a room for parents to meet in, and a space for planning, consultation, and decision making. A more or less ideal model was sought in which the communication between the two players involved was mutual and based on equality in much of the decision making concerning instruction and opportunities for students.

In a third phase, we saw a communication conflict between teachers and the PA, an increase in the teachers' political strength, or the PA tiring in its demands. We conclude that the future of school–family relationships — not only in this one school but possibly more broadly — may fall into a process of extremes, both characterized by unilateral actions. Two different conditions may arise:

- (1) A subservient relationship: Parents visit the school, listen carefully and submissively to the eloquent discourse that comes from the teacher, asking, soliciting, suggesting, and expecting help from everybody in the name of the children's well-being. Teachers clearly perceive parental involvement in terms of consultation and financial help, replacing the role of the government and/or the local authorities.
- (2) Two power fronts: Elementary school teachers and parents who are also teachers at a higher grade level. If there is a consensus on goals, unity creates power.

The problem occurs when the equal partners (teachers, and parents who are also teachers) become antagonistic because they have conflicting purposes. The elementary teachers fear losing their status as teachers (one which implies knowledge and power). The higher grade level teachers want to make what is explicit in the law a reality and become active members in the initiatives — producers of ideas rather than merely reproductive and subservient.

Conclusions

The study has shown that the relationship between the school and the family constitutes a relationship between cultures: the school culture (which is socially dominant and, therefore, is self-represented as the national culture) and the local culture or cultures (Iturra, 1990; Silva, 1993). Educational authorities and teacher educators are starting to discover this fact and to include inter/multicultural education in the lexicon of official speech.

A School of Choice in Portugal

In "Rumo ao Futuro Elementary School: A Portuguese School of Choice", Ramiro Marques portrays a project in a Catholic private school.

The school, in Entrocamento, a city of 18,000, north-east of Lisbon, has 101 students of diverse economic and cultural backgrounds: 50% middle-class families with an average annual income of U.S. \$20,000; one-third with a college education; 50% working-class families with an average annual income of U.S. \$12,000. Ninety-seven of the students are European and 3% are African. The school is private, belonging to the local Catholic church. It is located in a small building with six classrooms and a family room. Children are bussed from all over the city. The state pays for the tuition of children who are below the poverty line. Three of the six teachers have their salaries paid by the state. In many ways, the school is like a magnet school and a school of choice.

Research Questions

The study emphasized three questions: Does the planned action improve pupil achievement? Does the action help to strengthen family involvement? What conditions are required in order to make it possible to guarantee and extend good programs for school-family partnerships?

Methodology and Interventions

The project was conducted by a team of teachers, the school head, and the author, who was the facilitator. The research team met once a month to present and analyze data. The other four teachers did not join the team because of lack of time but helped to implement parent involvement strategies. Interviews with teachers and parents were carried out by the assistant principal.

During the two years, there were three main interventions: a family center, an open line for families, and an after-school program. The family center is a small room with a table, chairs, coffee machine, and informative materials. The center was created to make parents feel welcome in the school, but it was run by the principal, not parents, and not used often. The principal reported that parents were not familiar with having a room of their own and did not have time to use it. The principal said that the parents prefer to have meetings with teachers to deal with school problems and discuss ways of improving curriculum and students' learning.

The open telephone line was the most successful intervention. All families have telephones. The principal asked parents to call teachers at home, even at night and on weekends, and they often did. The telephone calls, in most cases, dealt with problems related to a particular child who was having difficulties. Three out of four called the school at least once per trimester, and one if four called even more often. Both teachers and parents reported that the open telephone line was very useful.

There were three types of after-school programs: arts, physical education and tutorial activities. The parents were welcome in the school. Some assisted teachers in the classrooms, telling stories, singing or preparing field visits. About 12 parents took part in those activities, mostly college educated. Eight were teachers in local public schools.

More than 50% of the parents attended monthly parents' meetings. Neither teachers nor parents had a role in deciding the agenda. However, the meetings were participatory. Parents not only asked questions, but sometimes expressed their dissatisfaction with the principal.

At the end of the year, a parents' committee coordinated a school party. Most of the activities developed at this school were Epstein's type 2 and 3 practices (communication and parent helping at the school).

Outcomes, Analysis, and Discussion

The main conclusions from the study were:

- The parents are satisfied with communication between teachers and families and said they have a voice in school policies and practices.
- Parents said the school satisfied families' needs and expectations.
- Parents liked opportunities to talk with teachers about objectives, to make decisions and problem-solving plans together.
- Parents and teachers said the interventions reinforced student motivation, positive behaviors, and homework routines.

The analysis of the data from interviews, observations, meetings, and the principal's reports allows the team to conclude that: (1) parents and teachers developed positive attitudes toward cooperation and began to coordinate their activities; (2) some parents reported that there was an atmosphere in the family that allowed children to perceive continuity between the home and school and develop more positive attitudes toward school and learning.

An additional achievement was reported by the principal, who met often with the facilitator. He said that being involved taught him how to work better with people, run meetings in a more positive way, and write research reports.

A few project limitations must be noted: parents did not participate in the research team, the school board or in other decision-making councils and the family center was only seen as a room for meetings. Nevertheless, in the view of the team the project goals were reached because: (1) the principal trusted parents and was committed to the project; (2) the principal and teachers received help and information from the facilitator on how to implement the plan; and (3) the small grant of discretionary money was enough to start the project, and to fund the family center and a newsletter.

Working with Immigrant Families in Lisbon

M. Adelina Villas-Boas describes her work in "Primary School No. 1001, Lisbon, Portugal", in her case, "The Role of Indian Immigrant Families in their Children's Literacy Acquisition".

Since the Portuguese decolonization in 1974, the Indian community in Portugal has increased steadily. Although this population varies in socioeconomic status (SES) a great majority of low to medium SES families live adjacent to a modern and wealthy urban part of Lisbon, where most immigrants from ex-colonies live in small, substandard houses.

The School

Primary School No. 1001 is situated in this urban area and its population of about 400 students (boys and girls) comes both from the substandard housing and the modern buildings.

About 40% of the students are immigrants, 36% of whom are Indians. Although the teachers consider minority parents hard to reach, they are happy with the high percentage of Indian children whom they consider pleasant and clever, good at mathematics and visual arts. However, the rate of failure is high because of difficulties in reading and writing which the teachers believe is because they speak an Indian language at home.

Two types of questions were asked in this study: (1) Is it possible to help ethnic minority parents change attitudes and activities related to literacy development? (2) How will this enriched home environment affect their children's acquisition of reading skills?

Methodology

In order to address our questions, 33 first graders from the four existing classes in the above-mentioned primary school, corresponding to 35% of the school's Indian minority, participated in the study. Two classes were assigned to be the experimental and the other two the control group. The research was conducted over about one year. Data were collected at the beginning and end of the intervention to measure the literacy development of the students and to analyze the changes in parents' attitudes and expectations towards school and parental involvement. The Test of Early Reading Ability (Reid, Hresko & Hammill, 1981) and the questionnaire issued by the Institute for Responsive Education were used after having been adapted to the Portuguese language and culture.

The program for the students in the experimental group of the project to improve home-school relations and parental involvement in the children's literacy development consisted of: (a) regular workshops with parents; (b) home visits by mediators to modify the nature of literacy events; (c) small trips with the children to foster their acculturation process.

Results

Information on the results was gathered from four sources: (a) parent participation in the sessions, (b) reports from the mediators on home visits and trips, (c) analysis of questionnaires, and (d) testing of the children.

Parents involved themselves in the three required situations (workshops, home visits, trips). Teachers were surprised at the attendance rate at the workshops which varied from 41% to 82% throughout the nine meetings. They also acknowledged that parents came to talk to them frequently and that students had become "less shy and more communicative". Parents spontaneously said that they enjoyed the meetings and become less and less shy.

The home visitors reported that the children looked forward to their visits and the parents who, at the beginning, had been difficult to meet and had even rejected the possibility of being visited in their homes, welcomed them, sometimes with food and presents. This happened because, as one mother put it, they realized that the home visitors, unlike the teachers, were fond of the children and had plenty of time for them.

The mothers enjoyed the trips. They dressed elegantly for the occasion and mentioned that they were happy to have an opportunity not only to go beyond the area where they lived but also to help their children learn better. Although invited, teachers only accompanied the children on one occasion.

Literacy Development

Significant interaction between the groups (experimental vs. control) and the pre-test vs. post-test due to the variable group indicated that the experimental group improved on the literacy test significantly more than the control group (MANOVA), revealing a significant difference between the gain scores of the two groups ($T^2 = 1.01758$, approx. $F(3.27) = 9.15824$, $p < .001$). The disordinal interaction of the analysis of variance confirms that, at the end of the intervention, the scores of the experimental group were much higher than those of the control group, although the latter group results had initially been higher. Furthermore, according to the teachers, the reading performance of the students in the experimental group was better than their mathematics performance, which was not usually the case.

Changes in Parent Attitudes

Comparative analysis indicated four categories of changes in the results on the IRE questionnaires: *productive learning relationship* between parents and teachers (the percentage of 58% of parents who had agreed they would talk freely with the teachers had increased to 94%); *communication between home and school* (parents contacted the teacher more often to be informed about their child's progress in school); *aspirations and expectations* (parents' expectations were slightly higher: they valued academic education more, they realized that their own influence could be positive but, although they were more informed about teachers' positive influence, still many doubts persisted); *attitude towards school* (parental attitudes towards school were still more positive at the end of the intervention). The mean abstention rate diminished in all categories, which seems to indicate an increase in parents' self-assurance.

These results seem positive, and a few lessons were learned: (a) Indian minority parents are not hard to reach; (b) parental attitudes have changed towards themselves and towards school: they have gain confidence to express their opinions and even to disagree, when beforehand they just kept silent; (c) minority parents became involved in literacy activities; (d) parental involvement in emergent literacy diminished the rate of failure; (e) parents became more demanding in terms of their cooperation with teachers on educational values and on specific forms of helping their children at home; (f) parents trusted the home visitors who "had time, and kiss the children".

Teachers' attitudes need to be changed in order to contact these parents more often to discuss educational objectives and schoolwork practices, and in order to show more affection to them and their children.

Schools Reaching Out: An Australian Case Study

In his case study, "Schools Reading Out", Derek Toomey reports on one specific intervention in an Australian primary school where he implemented a program of Paired Reading with families of poor readers.

The study was conducted in a school system in the State of Victoria in the grip of demoralizing change. The aim was to see whether a program with a successful track record such as Paired Reading, could make an impact on home – school relations in such unfavorable circumstances.

The study was also intended as a contribution to the literature on Paired Reading. In this approach a child chooses a book to take home; the child and parent read aloud simultaneously until the child signals that he/she is ready to read alone. When the child makes an uncorrected error, the parent begins reading with the child again.

The School

Woodvale Primary is in the northern suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne in a mixed area of industry and low-cost housing. Of persons aged 15 and over, 45.2% had an income of less than \$12,000 per year; 16.6% of the workforce was unemployed. Of the adult population 38% completed full-time education by the age of 15 or younger. The area has a multi-ethnic population, many of whom speak a language other than English.

The Intervention

The six-week program involved a program of parents hearing their grade 1, 2 and 3 children using the Paired Reading method. We aimed at parents of poor readers, among whom we are likely to find some of those who are most difficult for the school to reach and most in need of support. These families were visited and helped at home by trained, experienced teachers taking the author's course at La Trobe University. Previous work carried out by the author in schools serving economically disadvantaged populations had suggested that the children most at risk of having difficulties in learning to read are those who do not respond successfully to initial attempts to teach them in school and whose parents do not give them help at home with learning to read because they cannot, or are not aware of how important their help can be (Toomey, 1989). Usually the parents who respond to school reading projects are a minority of "enthusiast" parents, and those parents who do not readily visit the school may cut themselves off from this advice because of their uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Research Questions

The study questions included: How effective is Paired Reading in this disadvantaged school? What will be the effects of trying to reach out to all the parents of poor readers? Is the method appropriate to all parents of poor readers? What happens when parents' implementation is supported by the use of home visits made by experienced teachers? Will an external intervention of this kind succeed in mobilizing parent-teacher cooperation?

Putting the Plan into Operation

After initial discussions with the school's principal, a submission was made to the School Council, which agreed to membership in IRE's League of Schools Reaching Out. The principal discussed the proposal at a staff meeting, and the staff also approved the plan. The teachers nominated poor readers in Grades 1, 2 and 3 to take part and sent home books regularly with the children.

Data Gathering

The volunteer teachers conducted individual reading tests using the Neale analysis (Neale, 1989) before and after the program, and parents and teachers each filled in questionnaires reporting on the students' interest in reading before and after the program. The teachers were also asked to make assessments of the students' reading competence before and after the program, using the Griffin profiles of reading attainment (Griffin, 1989). In addition, the teacher volunteers and the research assistant kept detailed notes of their visits, recording the parents' implementation of the method and any other pertinent facts. Each volunteer tutor worked with two families and visited them at least four times.

Participants

Teachers nominated a total of 22 families. A long process of letters, meetings, and follow-up phone calls was used to recruit parents, especially targeting poor and hard-to-reach families. Out of the original 22 we had one refusal and two dropouts for a total of 19 participants.

Results

Just over half of the participants implemented Paired Reading effectively. Evidence which supports this assessment included: how seriously the family took the reading sessions; their interest in the process and commitment to it; how well parent and child got along in the sessions; adherence to the Paired Reading method; efforts to obtain or buy books; and absence of interruptions. Of the remaining cases most of the difficulties appeared to flow from the parents' inability to read English and/or manage the situation effectively.

The Neale Analysis showed little growth in reading competence, but the test itself was strongly criticized by the home visitors who offered evidence that the test results did not always capture reading improvement noted in their own observations.

Conclusions and Implications

The project did not succeed in transforming home-school relations in the school. Since a strong emphasis on home – school relations is not a new thing in Victoria, so it does not have the appeal of a new innovation that it might have had in some of the other countries involved in the larger project.

We hoped that the project would be so successful in involving parents and children that teachers would take a greater interest. But this change did not occur. As a result, I think that there is probably truth in the idea that teachers must feel some ownership of a project before they become involved in it. Strategies to engage teachers in decision making about teacher-parent relationships might have more success.

Reaching the Hardest to Reach

We attempted to involve all the nominated families of poor readers. We managed to involve parents who are often missed in similar programs and that difference, to some extent, accounts

for some of the difficulties encountered by the home visitors. While I do not have firm comparative evidence, I believe that many parent involvement programs in schools fail to include some of the hardest-to-reach families and that often these families are not able to give the support to their children's education that they would like to. There is also the question of the children's competence and interest. The parent involvement strategy is a useful one, but it will not necessarily work for all children. Programs designed to support their own children's education at home should not be introduced without special efforts being made for individual children who need them, such as the Reading Recovery program. It is important that parents are not left with the feeling that the difficulties are their fault.

It is not true that these parents did not care — far from it. Our home visitors reported that a number of parents entreated them to continue helping their child. Some offered money to them to give individual tuition. We have a picture of some parents greatly worried about their children's reading development, not able to help as they would wish, and desperate to get something done.

Some families could not give adequate help despite the assistance our project provided. They needed assistance with parenting or their own literacy. As a specialist, I can say that most reports of such interventions concentrate on the successes and leave out these difficulties.

Not a Panacea

This study adds to the evidence of the success of using the Paired Reading method for parents to assist their children who are poor readers. However, parent involvement programs should not be regarded as a panacea for all problems. It is the school's role to provide good schooling. There are many forces which impinge on children's educational progress, potentially including the teacher, the peer group, the child's natural ability, the organization of the school, or the resources available. Involving parents should never be an excuse for not providing well-resourced schools. There is a need for special programs for children who are less successful in their literacy development and whose parents are not able to help them.

Family and School Educating Together in Chile

In this summary case Bernardita Icaza of the Center for Research and Development in Education (CIDE) in Chile draws on her case study in Santiago, "Project Educando Juntos — Family and School Educating Together".

The case briefly summarized here was part of a larger project, "Educating Together" of CIDE, a private foundation in Chile. "Educando Juntos" began in 1991, to improve the conditions for children's development by involving parents as educators of their children.

National Context

In 1990, after the re-establishment of a democratic government, the country began a process of democratizing the educational system. Many government policies encourage schools to involve families. But this idea is still in its initial stage, and in most schools policy and practice do not

coincide. The practice is left to the initiative of each school. One cause for hope is the increasing interest on the part of some school principals to promote democratic participation that includes the whole educational community.

The School Context

The project was carried out in two public schools: “Los Almendros” (S1) and “Republica Dominicana” (S2) in the municipality of La Florida, situated south-east of metropolitan Santiago. Most students come from a state-subsidized housing area that has one of the highest percentages of poor and extremely poor families in La Florida, mingled with working- and middle-class sectors. Between 25% and 50% of the families served are considered poor.

S1 has 1,350 students in grades K–12. S2 is an elementary school, grades K–8, with 1,200 students.

Implementation of the Project

In the first phase in S1 10 teachers from kindergarten to second grade and 12 parent leaders, mostly mothers, were involved in activities which included interviews of teachers and parent leaders to diagnose the problems children face and hear parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of family–school issues and how to address them. The group designed materials and activities on which parents and teachers could collaborate. Seven training workshops were conducted separately for parents and teachers.

During year two we revised the methodologies, added new materials, and added a second school for comparison (S2). The activities included developing new training materials; eight monthly training workshops in each school (in S2 the workshops were for parent leaders and teachers together); and a day-long session at the end of the year with parent leaders, teachers, and the school principal to carry out a participatory evaluation and gather suggestions for continuing the program the following year.

In the third year there was a considerable increase in activity. The work now included 75 parents and teachers representing nine schools in the municipality, including S1 and S2. There were eight monthly workshop sessions and an all-day evaluation and planning meeting.

The level of our intervention changed from a direct approach, with training teams at the classroom level (home-room teacher and two parent leaders), to an indirect one, where we trained teams at the school level, who in turn trained other teachers to apply the materials in their classes.

Research Questions

- What did parents and teachers (K–3) have to say about family–school relationships at the start of the project?
- How did perceptions change, and what kind of joint actions were initiated as a result of the project?
- How were educational innovations applied by the two schools? What were the common elements and differences between the two schools?

Data Gathering

The data-gathering strategies included diagnostic interviews to obtain parents' and teachers' perceptions before starting the educational intervention in S1; interviews of parents and teachers after the first year of the project; questionnaires for parents; administration of the IRE instruments; a group interview with students in three classrooms (grades 1–3); interviews with the principals and counselors; and conversations with key persons in the two schools. Self-observation forms were used to document events in parents' meetings when education materials from the project were used.

A participatory approach was followed, but we only partially implemented the IRE model of "Parent Teacher Action Research": the participants (parents and teachers) were fully part of the diagnostic interviews, and their comments influenced the project design, but they did not conduct the research.

Results of the Diagnosis

The voices of teachers and parents were heard in the diagnostic interviews at the start of the project. Teachers want the support of the family to educate their students, including social, emotional, academic, and moral support. They expect the family to reinforce what is being taught at school. They are concerned that fewer students from poor sectors seem to have stable families. Nevertheless, there are diverse perspectives among teachers. Some teachers seem very open to working with parents, while others seem more reluctant. Factors such as age, years in service, and the kind of professional education they had seem to influence teachers' attitudes. Teachers' opinions are divided regarding their expectations in terms of parental support. They say it is indispensable, but at the same time they say they are being bothered because of the limitations that make supporting children especially difficult for poor families.

Teachers identified many factors which impede school-home collaboration, primarily parent characteristics or conditions. Only a few respondents cited teachers' lack of motivation to work with parents. Some teachers expressed disappointment with "today's" parents and indicated mistrust of them because they "accuse" or blame teachers, in conversations with the principal.

Parents interviewed said that they feel invited to participate in a variety of activities initiated by the school, including celebrations, fund raising, athletic events, and the cleaning and painting of classrooms. They noted regular and occasional opportunities to encounter teachers such as conferences when teachers call them for specific reasons, and daily encounters when they bring or pick up their child from school. Parents say that some teachers expect them to support their children at home to reinforce learning, while others prefer that parents do not intervene, because they say this may confuse the child.

Parents indicated several reasons why parents do not participate actively in the education of their children: work schedules, the care of other small children at home, and financial problems. Some believe that some parents do not take responsibility for their children's education, leaving the task of education to schools.

Other parents say they do not know how to help their children, or lack formal education themselves to be able to help. Still others feel ashamed to go to their child's school, because they are afraid the teachers will talk about their shortcomings.

Findings

We verified that the relationship between the family and the school is a true concern among principals, teachers, and parents. School professionals lack preparation for working with families. The project's methods and materials were well received by teachers and parents. Teachers were impressed by the capacity of the parent leaders to reflect and to suggest solutions for the problems that the school faces.

The exchanges between parents and teachers resulted in more trust between them. Teachers said that the work with parents gave them a rich opportunity to get to know their students' families. Parents expressed their appreciation for teachers in their personal and professional dimensions. Better communication between parents and teachers helped them to improve communication between the adults (parent and teachers) and children. This improvement positively influenced children's disposition for learning.

The activities helped parents and teachers to gain an increasing awareness of their roles in mediating their children's learning. Parents and teachers started to see themselves as coeducators. They saw the need to look for common criteria in respect of parenting and education, and the need to identify the responsibilities of each. The school teams formed during the training workshops animated actions between school and family. Both teachers and parents said they experienced important personal and professional growth during the project and reported positive effects on their own families.

Lessons

- (1) *Differences between the two schools.* In S1 some teachers did not keep up a commitment to work with parents. We saw fear on their part that the boundaries separating their different roles would be crossed. We think that it is possible to achieve greater understanding and commitment between teachers and parents when they develop a relationship of mutual trust through workshop sessions for parents and teachers together, as was the case in S2.

In S1 there were also important changes in the teaching staff and in the school's management committee which weakened parent-teacher teamwork even more. The number of activities and projects in which they were involved also had some influence on the lack of continuity in the project work. The principal reported that while the project had achieved important successes in their school, the strategy was not consolidated in a way that would be continued by the teachers.

In contrast, we have seen a more autonomous process developing in S2. The leadership of the school counselor has had an important influence. She continued the strategy because she saw it responded to the schools' educational goals and values. Every month, teachers and parent leaders get together for a workshop session, experience the methodological steps contained in the educational material, and prepare the sessions for introducing the materials in the parents' meetings of each class. The counselor believes that there is a unique enthusiasm and commitment among the teachers and parents but recognizes that at times it is hard to motivate some teachers.

The lesson is that for a project such as this to be sustained there is the need for a person to animate it and coordinate it, offering committed leadership to the rest of the teachers and parents.

- (2) *Leadership roles.* The role of the facilitator is of central importance. In our case one CIDE staff member or more was regularly involved with parents and teachers during the years

when the project was being implemented. Once the facilitator leaves the school, the school needs one person to assume this kind of role. This is not always easy, though, because of the school professionals' lack of time, and/or because people in the schools (principals, teachers, and parents) need and expect support from the external institution.

- (3) *The usefulness of action research.* The regular practice of action research among all of the educational agents of the school could be of considerable help for the successful introduction and implementation of new programs and projects. Principals, parents, counselors, and teachers should be part of a learning process where they can define very clear steps to (a) regularly "read" their situation and investigate it, (b) plan the actions required for responding to the challenges it presents to them, and (c) evaluate their response, using the results to enrich action.

Cross-site Analysis and Discussion

This section of the chapter was written by Vivian Johnson, Co-Principal Investigator. For this discussion she draws on the full case studies. Most of the references are to these as yet unpublished documents.

Parent-Teacher Reluctance to Cross Boundaries

All of the studies revealed the constraints of tradition in teacher-parent relationships. Traditionally, educators have thought of parents' appropriate role as that of strong, mostly silent supporters of schooling. Expected to assist with homework, encourage children to work hard in school, and sign and return forms quickly, parents were not wanted in schools except on invitation to open house, to pick up report cards, or assist with raising money. Other requests for parents' presence at school usually meant that a child was in trouble, academically or socially (Johnson, 1993, p. 1).

With this tradition overwhelming transactions between parents and teachers, it is no wonder that in their case study, Silva and Vieira describe the new parental role at Pinhal do Rei School in Portugal as "a new world unfolding". Despite the potential for providing continuity between home and school inherent in this new world, previous experience makes some parents reluctant to pursue school-family partnership actively. The major theme that emerged from the case studies was the consistency of parents' and teachers' reluctance to develop partnerships. Even when one group decided to reach out to the other, there was often great uncertainty about how to proceed. Lack of experience in collaboration was a basic fact for nearly all participants in these cases, and some reluctance to cross established boundaries of home and school appeared in all the cases.

For both parents and teachers, behavior reported in the case studies seems to indicate similar causes for this reluctance: (1) the force of traditional beliefs, (2) fear of the unknown, and (3) lack of knowledge of how parents might become involved in schools.

The Force of Traditional Beliefs

The idea that school is the proper domain of teachers and that parents should not cross the boundaries into that domain is a strong traditional belief that creates barriers to parental involvement. Writing about Portugal, Marques notes:

... some parents believe that they should not meddle too much in school matters. It seems that some parents have delegated to the school a great deal of their educational responsibility as a result of the division of functions they perceive between the school and the family.

The Center's theory of overlapping spheres is not yet often realized in practice. Throughout the cases, the force of this traditional belief is illustrated by parental reluctance to become involved because it was not the proper thing to do. Silva and Vieira report:

The majority of them [parents] regarded with skepticism the invitation to become involved in school affairs since, in their recollection, parents went to the school only when they were summoned, if there were discipline problems with their children.

Teachers demonstrated their reluctance by expressing their sense of the proper dimensions of their teaching role, including time limits, and their notions about the appropriate relationship they should maintain in which parents support school from a safe distance at home. Silva and Vieira quote one teacher as saying: "I'll mind your children here, and you at home". And Icaza notes, "Teachers have fears, either openly expressed or more subtle, that the boundaries related to their different role would be surpassed" (Icaza, 1996).

Villas-Boas also points out: "The main reason to prevent the further involvement of teachers is their strong belief both in their traditional role inside the classroom and the limits of their schedule" (Villas-Boas, 1996).

In her case study in Prague Walterova summarized common teacher responses to change:

Teachers guard their traditional values, professional autonomy, personal authority and proved practices. Any change seems endangering to their previous position. Their resistance is a consequence of recent social and professional experience. The changing concepts of education and schooling have not reached most teachers. They have not accepted the new, broader model of the teachers' profession. They see themselves as mediators of cognition in special branches (math, science, history, etc.) and do not accept the role of social mediators. The outreach depends heavily on teachers' willingness and readiness to accept changes. (Walterova 1996)

Schools' Outreach and Parents' Inreach

There is general agreement among the case study researchers that schools are in the more powerful position and therefore should reach out to parents with creative initiatives that will overcome the reluctance of shy, fearful, or hesitant parents. The cases describe a wide range of such initiatives. In all the cases, many enthusiastic parents, teachers, and students participated in these activities and demonstrated that successful collaboration benefits students, teachers, families, and schools.

In each site, some parents were reluctant to participate because of fear of schools, lack of knowledge, or traditional beliefs. And some teachers resisted these activities whenever they felt the activity crossed boundaries into their domain and especially when the activity required them to do something that was not compulsory within the present educational structure.

This was true even if the teachers agreed that the activity seemed to improve school climate, home-school relationships, or children's school performance. Resistant teachers were those who had a strong sense of the limits of the dimensions of their profession and they would state that the activity requested was not their job. This was especially true in the case of activities outside the school such as home visits as shown in Walterova's study and Villas-Boas's study. However, within the school, some teachers refused to participate in activities that they felt

added additional time or additional duties to their traditional work. This included serving on the action-research team in Marques's study, providing workshops for parents in Villas-Boas's study and additional meetings with parents in Icaza's and Martinez's studies (Martinez, 1996).

Understanding Teachers' Reluctance

A recent OECD study (OECD, 1995) indicated that teachers and their profession are highly respected in some countries included in this study (Portugal and Spain). Despite this evidence, in the case studies in those countries, some teachers continue to reflect feelings of low status and resist parental involvement in schools.

We must conclude that the problem of teachers' reluctance to involve parents is not simply a problem of teachers' concern that there is a low level of respect for the teaching profession and that people want to interfere with their work because they do not respect teachers as professionals. Other factors must influence this attitude. However, it is difficult to determine what these are as there is neither common multinational training of teachers, nor common textbooks used in different countries. In addition, there is diversity among teachers in the profession in terms of backgrounds and beliefs.

One factor that certainly influences teachers' attitudes regarding outreach to parents is the presence or absence of administrative support for outreach. In schools where principals provide the time, and acknowledge and reward teachers for engaging in these activities, teachers are more likely to make phone calls and home visits to parents and engage in other outreach activities as well.

Teacher Professionalism: Constructing "Normality"

Another dimension of this issue was offered by Steven Stoer, a sociologist from the University of Porto, Portugal, who served as an adviser to the study, at the meeting of case study researchers. He noted that parents would not in fact expect to be involved in the domain of other professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or engineers. Stoer believes that the difference is that other professionals work on things that are "not normal, or a-normal", while teachers are involved in "constructing normality" and parents are part of the same process. Therefore, school-family partnership makes sense because each institution is working toward the healthy development of individuals in a long-range process. Families are not usually involved with doctors, lawyers, or engineers in processes that take 10 to 12 years. That would be abnormal. But the process of educating a child in the formal education process takes that long and therefore home-school partnership strengthens the construction of that normality.

Parent Fears and Lack of Confidence

While teachers may resist outreach because of fear of parental encroachment into their domain, many parents are reluctant to cross the boundary into schools because they fear schools, either because of their negative school experiences or lack of confidence due to their own limited formal education. These parents may have what Toomey calls "an irrational awe of teachers' professional competence . . ." (Toomey, 1996). Icaza's case study supports this point:

Parents are not accustomed to expressing disagreement with teachers, so the majority tend to respond cautiously or to please. Popular sectors in Chile highly value school, teachers and education for their children. So it is difficult to have a critical attitude toward education, or to find negative aspects related to the quality of the education their children receive. (Icaza, 1996).

She also notes the reluctance to participate caused by parents' fear, shame, and lack of formal education. Similar experiences are noted in all the case studies. Toomey concludes: "those parents who do not readily visit the school may cut themselves off from this advice because of their uncertainty and lack of confidence or lack of awareness of the value of their help to their children even though they are usually very concerned about their children's success in school." He also notes that, in the cases where parents have poor English skills, parents "will usually conceal this from the school and the very low self-esteem which usually accompanies low literacy" . . . "these parents will not approach the school because they are afraid that their low literacy will be detected and this will harm their children".

Such fears may result in parents cutting themselves off from the opportunity to learn about ways to become involved in their children's education, so they do not receive training when it is offered, as Toomey points out. This point is underscored in Villas-Boas's study. Were home visitors not involved in the literacy study she conducted, it is unlikely that parents would have participated in the home learning activities, because they were reluctant to go to their child's school. She reported:

Although at first, families were not very enthusiastic about being visited, the success of the home-visiting program much be emphasized. Without the mediators who visited the children regularly and showed emotion and respect to them, parents wouldn't have come to school so willingly, and the successful implementation of their involvement in their children's literacy development might not have been achieved.

Parents may lack knowledge of how to participate in schools because they have cut themselves off from pursuing the information. Another reason for parents' lack of knowledge of how participation in their children's schools might work is noted by Walterova as "an underdeveloped mechanism of participatory educational policy and a lack of experience . . .". Therefore, "Many parents were waiting for school initiatives". According to Icaza's findings, for some parents, school is either a mystery or a frightening place.

Other parents do not know how to help their children, or lack formal education themselves to be able to help. Still others feel ashamed to go to school, because they are afraid the teachers will talk about their children's problems.

Intercultural Relationships

Relationships in these case studies represent intercultural boundary crossings. The differences in the orientation, interests, beliefs, and actions between teachers and parents illustrate the dynamics of cross-cultural factors at work. Culture in this case is both the classic definition of "a way of perceiving, believing, evaluating and behaving" (Golnick & Chinn quoting Goodenough, 1987) and a more specific definition relating to the dynamic interactions seen in these studies. Silva and Vieira provide this focus in their study in Portugal:

The concept of culture is used here to suggest the pattern of meaningful organization in terms of representations and symbols, resulting from varied social circumstances and constructions among which are social origin and the different interactions to which each individual from each group is exposed. The focus of such an

approach is to gain knowledge of the cultural and professional identity of each actor: Who are the parents? Who are the teachers? What is the Parents' Association? What is the dynamic resulting from the interaction between these cultures which meet sometimes in solidarity, other times juxtaposed, and, in other instances, with friction?

The friction is sometimes indicated by signs of mutual distrust between teachers and parents. Some parents fear school participation because they are concerned about being blamed by teachers for the student's low achievement. As Icaza points out, "A child's low achievement at school is seen as an indicator of a lack of concern on the part of the family". Other parents are concerned with contradictory messages from teachers.

Parents say teachers expect that they support their children at home to reinforce learning activities (some teachers expect this, while other prefer that parents do not intervene, because they say this may confuse the child ...)

Teachers may blame parents for not responding to school communications; they interpret this as a lack of responsibility. Teachers may not trust parents because they have experienced some parents' misuse of their power in making unwarranted accusations or blaming teachers generally when they talk to the principal.

Role Differences

Signs of mutual mistrust between parents and teachers may indicate role differences. Teachers are concerned with working with a group of children, while each parent is concerned with the progress of his/her own child. This role difference may account for the contrasts in parents' and teachers' perceptions of opportunities to meet shown in the case study in Spain. Martinez reported:

More teachers than parents think they come together "frequently" to discuss educational objectives, to make decisions, and to make plans to solve problems. In all of these cases, teachers tend to feel they are providing parents with enough opportunities to talk and to solve problems together. Some teachers insist that parents should come to school more often to meet with them.

She goes on to say: "However, parents do not have the same perceptions as teachers about the opportunities they have to meet." She then gives the following quote from a parent's response to the questionnaire: "If we do not ask teachers to meet with them, we do not see them. Parents are the ones who always ask to meet."

Observing that parents' priorities are not always easy for teachers to meet, Martinez concludes by pointing out that:

Despite the needs described, it can be said that parents, in general, have a positive attitude towards teachers and the school. She further notes that one very positive result of the action-research project was an Open Doors Day, a new activity in which parents were invited to come to the school to see how the school works and view students' work. The outcome was improved communication among parents, teachers and students.

Social Class Differences

In addition to role distinctions between teachers and parents, there may also be social class differences. In discussing their case, Silva and Vieira describe the background of parents most

likely to participate in schools as “a smaller group of parents came forward, by virtue of being closer to the school’s ideology and practice, to form the Parents’ Association”.

Being “closer to the school’s ideology and practice” also seems to imply greater use of written versus spoken language, since Silva and Vieira also note the predominance of oral culture among parents. Icaza also points to a similarity in Chile, saying:

The culture of popular families in Chile is principally oral. When the child enters school, s/he begins a transition towards a world in which the predominant language is written.

Silva and Vieira also note some surprises across class lines regarding the woman who became the leader of the Parents’ Association.

Paradoxically, this mother didn’t seem to be particularly qualified according to her educational background. She is a housewife and the wife of a bank clerk. However, among her friends were teachers and other people with bachelor’s degrees. She became involved in the Parents’ Association from the very start.

This parent is particularly noteworthy within the discussion of cultural differences between parents, teachers, and researcher/interventionists. She is the ideal liaison among these different cultural groups.

Different from the majority of the teachers, this mother knows the community well: She knows most of the families, she has played a rich mediating role between parents and school, and the communication and instruction of the children has benefited from her capacity for motivation, empathy, and interpretation. In fact, she is like a tribe elder who knows the local processes of enculturation and socialization, and knows how to filter the school culture, sometimes abstract and anomalous, to the children. She helps others avoid the conflict that exists between the different knowledge, culture, and language that school and local community have.

Later, the researchers note that this woman was able to assist a gypsy boy in improving his performance in mathematics because “she is knowledgeable of the context which supports the child’s understanding”.

Teachers-as-parents

Silva and Vieira also note another cultural component in the multicultural mixture that influences relationships in the development of home–school collaboration. That component is: “the significant presence of teachers in the Parents’ Associations”. Pointing out that this phenomenon has not been studied in Portugal, they raise significant issues relative to the dual role.

Another interesting aspect that was salient in our study is the fact . . . that the relationship between teachers and parents’ associations is essentially a relationship between elementary teachers and high school teachers, respectively. On one level, they are both education professionals. But, on another level, the two groups have different training and possess distinct academic degrees with historically different professional paths that have been translated to different social prestige.

Given the conflict between the Parents’ Association and the teachers in the case study school, Silva and Vieira’s questions raise issues that should be the focus of later study regarding the impact of social class distinctions on home–school collaboration.

The Need to Define Terms in Cross-cultural Interaction

Another perspective on the complexities involved in crossing intercultural boundaries to build partnerships among teachers, parents, and researchers, is offered by sociologist Steven Stoer regarding the issue of definition of terms:

In addition, the concept of partnership, which has indeed become part of the jargon of international organizations and which finds its predominant meaning very much attached to socioeconomic models identified, above all, with the Anglo-Saxon world, is mobilized generally throughout the studies as if its meaning not only was known, but was also immediately applicable in all the countries covered by the studies. Here, the Portuguese case — home to three of the studies — is illustrative, for partnership as a formal team — in Portuguese designated “*partenariado*” — has appeared mainly via social and economic programmes sponsored by the European Union. However, partnership as informal work among persons/entities with the same aims and common interests, as part of social roots at the local level, is conveyed by the Portuguese term “*parceria*”. In order to “build stronger home–school–community partnerships” in Portugal, certainly both usages not only need to be taken into account, but also interrelated in a dynamic fashion.

Facilitator-interventionists: Another Cultural Component

The facilitator-researchers were outsiders who intervened in the schools to promote family–school partnership, and in doing so they crossed important boundaries. Their role proved to be important for the implementation of the project. In most cases the schools welcomed and enjoyed the existence of a “friendly visitor”, who often provided services of benefit to the school such as offering referrals to agencies or individuals, giving information about educational opportunities, brokering other collaborations with the facilitator’s institution, offering advice on pedagogical or administrative problems, bringing materials from the Center and IRE.

Given the power of traditional relationships and the complexity of cultural differences between parents and teachers, implementing programs of home–school partnership is very challenging and most schools are unlikely to attempt these types of programs on their own. The availability of the facilitator as interventionist is noteworthy, because in each case they provided the inspiration and support needed by school staff and parents to make changes. The work was critical because the process of developing or expanding home–school connections is a difficult, complex nurturing process — not a one-time event.

The facilitator also brings an additional cultural component into the multicultural mix of parents, teachers, principals, and teachers-as-parents. As outside interventionists, facilitators enter the schools with particular approaches to the achievement of the goal of developing and sustaining family–school partnership. All these facilitators were from academic or research institutions or organizations and their focus is on an action-research approach which requires a special type of project format, elaboration, and analysis. The use of a questionnaire is a cultural artifact of researchers that was received differently in each setting. In Martinez’s case, the questionnaire itself served as a vehicle for discussion and a useful means of raising issues, concerns, and questions for parents and teachers. It was a foreign cultural artifact in the Silva – Vieira case. But as researchers from within the culture in which they worked, they “caught a train already in motion (in regard to the existence of activities turned to the family) . . . [and] possibly helped maintain and expand the dynamics already present”. By the second year of the project, however, there is an indication of cultural differences between the outside interventionists (who want the train to continue in the same direction) and the new faculty, who want to change its direction. “The school, paradoxically, seemed to move away from the goals of family involvement that we, as researchers, had sponsored.”

Icaza also mentions differences between the facilitators and the school in the case study in Chile:

. . . the expectations of the schools and CIDE team were very different; we expected that “school 1” would gradually appropriate the program, adapting and changing what was needed and gaining autonomy after two years. However, they expected the close presence of the CIDE team to continue. As the school principal states: “Educando Juntos” did not consolidate into the practice of teachers.

Differences in expectations that result in dependence on the facilitator were noted by Martinez:

Expectations about the facilitator were also very high. Because the project was introduced by a qualified person who came from outside the school and who worked with them, parents and teachers tended to see me as the person responsible for its success, and they became dependent on me. It was necessary to explain what action research means in order to avoid this view. It was also essential to help parents, teachers, and students realize that the success of the project depended especially on them, as they were its real performers.

Most of the outside researchers or facilitators reported personal satisfaction and professional benefit from having a different and more positive relationship with school practitioners, a relationship where feelings of status difference between a university professor and a school teacher are lessened because of opportunities to talk and work on a personal basis.

They hoped and worked to encourage insider ownership of the interventions which were introduced. However, the level of ownership varied from case to case. Toomey regarded his approach as an external intervention which “while at variance with the model of ‘organizational renewal’” proposed for schools, was none the less necessary, “given the demoralized state of the teaching force and the lack of resources for the labor-intensive program of home visits”. Therefore his approach was “to consult with teachers but to try to avoid making any demands on their time”.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whilst the ultimate success of the project depends on insiders, achieving family–school partnership is difficult and sometimes frightening. There is no normal time in school schedules to pursue this goal and neither teachers nor principals are usually trained for it. As Marques pointed out, facilitators provide training, information, guidance coordination, and support. Therefore, dependence on outside facilitators is not surprising, given the evidence of these cases regarding the barriers to family–school partnership that are discussed, including the lack of:

- (1) pre-service or in-service preparation for teachers and administrators about collaboration with families and communities;
- (2) preparation for families about collaboration with schools;
- (3) structures or mechanisms for informal communication (social gatherings, festivals, holiday events);
- (4) frequent communication regarding questions, issues, concerns, focusing on mutual goals;
- (5) focus on strategies to involve “hard-to-reach” parents (low income, poorly literate, culturally different);
- (6) willingness or ability to confront cultural differences within the school (e.g. family differences of race, ethnicity, social class; teacher differences: elementary–secondary, younger–older).

In addition, two persistent problems created additional barriers to home–school–community partnership:

- (1) common use of negative communication between the school and the home (parents are called when children are in trouble);
- (2) participation in governance councils is often limited to a few “knowing” or “elite” parents.

While the barriers cited above create or maintain boundaries between home and school that are difficult to cross, the case studies show that the multicultural mix of parents, teachers,

principals, and researcher-facilitators can provide an intercultural process that produces positive outcomes. However, the question of sustaining and expanding these outcomes must be raised because the force of traditional attitudes combined with the power of different cultural orientations between families and schools is unlikely to motivate people to develop and sustain family–school partnership without external support that is continuous and secure. Therefore, the following recommendations are suggested:

(1) Teacher Preparation

In none of the cases was there an indication that teachers or other educators had any specific preparation in their pre-service training, not has there been much if any attention to developing knowledge and skill through staff development or on-the-job training.

We recommend that teacher preparation programs add preparation for collaboration to curricula and staff development.

(2) Parent Information

Parents also usually lack knowledge and preparation for becoming partners with schools. Several of the projects included workshops and other activities to fill this gap.

We recommend that schools interested in developing family and community collaboration provide parents and other families with opportunities to learn — opportunities which are carefully attuned to the participants' needs, interests, and culture.

(3) Resources: Time, Space, Money, Facilitation

In most of the projects, lack of resources was cited as a serious barrier: not enough time, not enough money, unexpected or unplanned cuts in outside funding, and/or changing government policies that undercut the school's partnership activities.

We recommend that:

- *Time be allocated in each school for planning and implementation of home–school partnership activities;*
- *Space be provided for family centers to encourage teacher–parent meetings, informal school activities and parent information sessions;*
- *Funds be available for each school to develop home–school partnership activities. Funding should be available for staffing, equipment, and materials and facilitation by educators, and parents who have demonstrated leadership in this area, and/or outside facilitators;*
- *Universities and teacher preparation colleges approach schools to propose collaborative projects, offering faculty and student time for assistance.*

(4) Policy Support

Some of the researchers advocated change in government policies to allocate funding for partnership activities in the schools. In all of the countries, there are recent state, or national policies which in one way or another encourage school collaboration with families and/or communities. Not often were these laws cited as having strong impact on the work in the schools. However, the laws were “enabling”, because they provided a positive policy context for the initiation of the family–school projects.

Several of the researchers commented on the difficulties of spreading the work in their school to other schools in their region or country. Few plans for “scaling up” were identified but several of the project participants recommended efforts to do this. One positive example is in Chile, where the Ministry of Education has engaged a research center (CIDE) that organized the study for this multinational study to carry out parent education programs in other schools.

We recommend that establishment of policy review boards at national and local levels to evaluate and promote progress in parent – teacher implementation of home–school partnership policies.

Policy Review Boards could help to develop and sustain administrative support for home–school partnership. The Boards could suggest, for example, that partnership be included in teachers' and principals' professional evaluations and that resources including money and the time of outside facilitators be allocated to schools wishing to initiate programs of collaboration.

(5) Administrative Support

Formal government policies provide an enabling context. However, our studies have shown that informal policies, implemented by principals, have potent effects on school activities (Davies, Burch & Johnson, 1992). By emphasizing certain policies, principals have a dominant role in setting school objectives. Therefore, when principals stress the importance of family–school partnership, as shown in all the multinational cases, schools are more likely to promote such partnerships.

Similarly, principals' support of teachers who are leaders in home–school collaboration also sends a positive message regarding its importance in the school. Principals who provide the time, and reward teacher outreach to parents, including phone calls, notes and home visits, are likely to have more teachers engaging in these activities. When teachers who are leaders in developing creative outreach are given opportunities to share their strategies as general staff development, the value of home–school collaboration is acknowledged within the profession.

We recommend recognition and support of teacher-leaders in home–school collaboration through public acknowledgment and whatever incentives are available according to local or national laws.

(6) Action Teams

In most of the sites where a team approach was employed the process was felt to have been useful for better communication and more positive relationships between parents and teachers. Some of the researchers concluded that the school team was also an effective mechanism for planning and school problem solving. Walterova suggests that the team approach is an important example of democracy in action.

In a parallel action-research project in eight school sites in seven U.S. communities, the parent–teacher–action-research teams proved to be a useful device for doing studies of significance to local participants and for bringing together the teachers, parents, and administrators for common, mutually beneficial tasks (Palanki & Burch, 1995).

We recommend that action teams be tested as an approach in schools interested in improving teacher–family relationships and doing collaborative planning to increase home–school–community collaboration.

(7) Reaching the Hardest to Reach

A major concern in the project in Australia was the difficulty of reaching the parents in greatest need. The researcher uncovered evidence of the reticence of the "hardest-to-reach" parents to participate in parent involvement activities and recommends new methods of recruitment and encouragement to overcome their reticence. If, as seems apparent in this project and many of the others, the parent involvement activities are benefiting the academic development of the children of participating parents, the children of the "hardest-to-reach" families who are not reached at all may be further disadvantaged. Some of the other researchers shared this

concern about the most reticent parents but believed that the interventions were somewhat effective in overcoming this problem. The Australian researcher advocates using community-based adult education providers to reach the most reticent parents.

We recommend that schools seeking to improve family-school partnerships pay careful attention to who is being reached, and design interventions for those who are missed by traditional approaches.

(8) *Networking Among Projects*

We recommend that opportunities be provided for schools seeking to increase partnerships to communicate with other schools with similar interests and projects. Visitation is especially useful whenever distance and cost will allow for it.

Cross-national networking should also be encouraged and is more feasible now with the advent of relatively low-cost electronic linkages. Being part of an international project linked to the Center and IRE's League of Schools Reaching Out added to the enthusiasm and interest of the participants in several of the sites.

The researchers reported considerable satisfaction from the international networking which was a necessary part of the project. Most are interested in being involved in more multinational efforts.

Did the Projects Achieve their Goals?

All of the facilitators considered their projects successful in varying degrees. The biggest gains in most sites were improved communication and relationships between parents and teachers and better feelings by parents about the schools and teachers. Several of the schools reported substantial improvement in school morale and climate, and two noted big gains in academic achievement. One school experienced a large decrease in student dropouts.

Three sites documented gains in parent ability and confidence to assist their own children's reading and language development at home. Most recorded increased levels of parent involvement in school activities. A few of the sites achieved new arrangements with community institutions or agencies.

Both of the sites which emphasized reading (Melbourne and Lisbon) reported some specific and measurable successes in their at-home approaches, using university students as home visitors. In the case of the Lisbon project, more positive attitudes toward Indian parents and by the parents toward the school were recorded.

Working on this study has reinforced the view of most of the participants about the importance of exchanging ideas across national boundaries about this developing area of study and practice. The influence of families, communities, and schools on children's learning is universal and understanding of the effects of specific interventions can be aided through cross-cultural, cross-national research and exchange.

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