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Home-School Partnerships with Culturally Diverse Families: Challenges and Solutions for School Personnel

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SUMMARY. Home-school partnership is one of the important contributors to every child's learning. The changing demographics of the United States present an urgent need for home-school partnership with culturally diverse families. Traditional family involvement practices are challenged when working with multicultural families. The authors propose an ecological model as a possible solution, with an illustrative case study with Hmong parents. Examples of parent involvement programs that apply some aspects of the ecological model with culturally diverse families are presented. Future directions and recommendations are discussed. doi:10.1300/J370v22n02_05 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Home-school partnership can be defined as “establishing and maintaining productive, working relationships between families and schools to facilitate children’s learning . . . and the knowledge that children’s academic and social growth occurs across multiple settings” (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2002, p. 389). Home-school partnership takes into account the belief that, to maximize a student’s learning, all areas in which children develop need to be addressed. Over the last decades, the U.S. government has instituted policies and initiatives aimed at increasing the partnership between home and school. Some of these include Title 1, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994; and Parent Participation, Goal 1 and 8 of the National Education Goals Panel of 1998.

This article addresses issues related to home-school partnership when working with a culturally diverse student population. The importance of home-school partnership to students’ learning is discussed, with a primary focus on culturally diverse families. Relevant research is reviewed and an ecological model for working with a culturally diverse population is proposed. A case study with Hmong parents is used to illustrate how the ecological framework can be applied to individual cases. In addition, examples of intervention- and prevention-oriented parent involvement programs that apply some aspects of the ecological model with culturally diverse families are reviewed. Finally, future directions and recommendations are discussed. We begin with a working definition of home-school partnership.

SCHOOL-PARENT PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH

Years of research have shown that parent/family involvement contributes to better student outcomes related to learning and school success (Davies, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parent/family involvement can be conceptualized into three categories: parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, and parent involvement at home and school. Research points to all three categories as having positive impacts on student outcomes. Based on descriptive studies across student grade and income levels, Christenson and Sheridan (2001) identified four important family variables related to student performance: structure,

support, expectations, and enriching environments (see Table 1). These indicators “represent the idea that families can and do play different roles in supporting their children’s learning. School personnel increase the probability of family involvement when they value each role and help parents see the importance or benefit of different roles for their children” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, pp. 53-54).

Parent Involvement at Home

Support for parent participation at home was demonstrated by Finn (1998) who analyzed how specific parenting practices, such as organizing and monitoring time, assisting with homework, and talking about school issues, were linked to resilience of students despite challenges such as poverty, minority status, or native language. Callahan, Rademacher, and Hildreth (1998) found that children showed increased academic performance as a result of parents attending sessions on how to help their children with homework. Moreover, Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) found that the nature of involvement was an important aspect. Active teaching was found to be more appropriate with elementary school children, whereas reinforcing autonomy was more effective for older students learning time-management and study skills.

Parent Involvement at School

Also important to achieving positive student outcomes is parent participation either through volunteering or attending programs aimed at teaching parents how to help their children with academics. Many families are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities in order to be good partners in their children’s education (Epstein, Croates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). At all grade levels, most students want their families to be more involved and more willing to take action in assisting communication between home and school (Epstein et al., 1997). Promising outcomes have been documented in both mathematics and literacy when children’s parents/families are involved in the educational process (Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000; Galloway & Sheridan, 1994). Effective interventions range from teacher’s notes to formal training on how parents can help and work effectively with their children at home.

The need for parent/family involvement is essential beyond primary school grades. Keith et al. (1998) found that continued involvement has positive effects on high school learning as measured by grades, high-

TABLE 1. Varied Indicators of Family Correlates of Student Performance

Correlate	Indicator
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority given to schoolwork, reading, and learning. • Consistent monitoring of how time is spent. • Authoritative parenting style. • Development of a reflective problem-solving style. • Availability of learning materials and a place for study. • Delay of immediate gratification to accomplish long-term goals. • Routine for completing home tasks. • Regular communication with school personnel. • Attendance at school functions. • Parental knowledge of child's current schoolwork strengths and weaknesses in learning.
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental responsibility to assist children as learners. • Encouragement and discussion of leisure reading. • Modeling learning by reading and doing math. • Positive emotional interactions. • Responsiveness to child's developmental needs/skills. • Expression of affection.
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations for child's success. • Use of effort and ability attributions. • Interest in and establishment of standards for children's schoolwork.
Enriching Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent dialogue. • Informed conversations about everyday events. • Opportunities for good language habits. • Orienting children's attention to learning opportunities. • Reading with children. • Monitoring and joint analysis of television. • Enriching learning experiences.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001, p. 55); reproduced with permission.

lighting the need for school programs and family involvement at the secondary level. Such programs will likely need to include training on how parents can nurture the goals and expectations of their child and foster communication with schools regarding their child's future plans.

Cultural values and norms also must be taken into consideration. Researchers (Lopez, 2001) have found that the way in which Hispanic parents/families are involved in their children's education is different from those of other families. Thus, the cultural values of the families have to be respected and considered when implementing parent/family involvement practices.

URGENT NEED FOR HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

Cultural diversity is an important factor when considering the 2004 United States census projections that reflect the rapid demographic

changes of our nation. According to the 2004 United States Census data, diverse groups will continue to increase proportionately with the greatest growth coming from Hispanic and Asian groups, and a decline in the percentage of people from mainstream European groups. The old notion of “white” majority is being replaced by one of multi-ethnic composition with no real “majority group.” Based on these projections, practitioners are likely to encounter ethnic diversity no matter where they practice. Changing demographics require greater practitioner engagement in culturally competent practice, including collaboration with multicultural parents.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), significant discrepancies between racial and ethnic groups in academic achievement exist, with African Americans and Latinos scoring substantially lower on achievement tests. Some scholars (Jencks & Philips, 1998) have identified socioeconomic status as a significant contributor to such “gaps” in achievement. Others (Viadero, 2000) argue that poverty is not the only factor, and that teachers’ expectations, quality of education, parenting, stereotyping, test bias, and academic coursework, among others, contribute to the gaps.

Challenges in Research

Currently, there is limited research to inform us whether practices that work for mainstream families also work for multicultural families. Many studies do not report the cultural background of their samples, instead describing the samples generically and thus not reporting the specific cultural make-up of the sample population. Researchers are facing several challenges: (a) Lack of culturally and psychometrically appropriate instruments to conduct research, (b) acculturation differences among immigrant children and families, and (c) variations in spoken language which create language barriers. Many children in this population do not speak English when they enter school, have not attended Head Start programs, or even participated in child-care. Their parents have different levels of education, socioeconomic status and English competency.

Challenges in Practice

Many traditional family involvement practices are considered ineffective with families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Esler et al., 2002; Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). Several issues need to be considered

when developing or selecting parental involvement programs for families from diverse backgrounds.

First, the ideal for parental involvement has traditionally been based on the model of upper-middle class, suburban community schooling with a family structure comprised of a two-parent, economically self-sufficient nuclear family, a working father and homemaker mother. This model is not appropriate for all families today, especially for minorities (de Carvalho, 2001; Finders & Lewis, 1994). For instance, middle class-based programs, with accompanying assumptions of cultural deficit for those not meeting the standard, do not provide Latino and other immigrant families with the tools needed to help their children and empower themselves (Daniel-White, 2002).

Second, culturally diverse parents are given information of varying quality regarding how to help their children attain their educational aspirations (Casas, Furlong, & de Esparza, 2003). Third, parents often do not know what roles they should play in the home-school partnership. This may be due to their lack of knowledge about the U.S. educational system and the cultural and educational expectations of teachers. For instance, immigrants are overwhelmingly supportive of education as a springboard for future success (Lopez & Sanchez, 2000). However, the length of time the family has been in the United States as well as their level of acculturation can affect parental involvement. In many cases, the child may be the language and cultural translator for the family and parents (Bemak & Chung, 2003), although such practice can produce conflicts and is not recommended.

Fourth, the concept and form of family varies from one culture to another. Members from the extended family in many cultures, for example, Chinese and Vietnamese (Lee & Manning, 2001; Nguyen, 2002), Native American (Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 1996) and Puerto Rican (D'Andrade, 1995), often participate actively in child rearing. Also, extended family, relatives, older children, and friends often provide emotional and economic support for children in African American families that are headed by single parents.

Fifth, there is no formula that works for all in any given racial/ethnic group, because within each group, there are many between-group (e.g., nationality, tribal, political) and within-group (e.g., gender, socio-economic, acculturation level) differences (Li, 1998; Liu & Li, 1998). Although the use of cultural knowledge to understand a particular group of people may be valid in general, not every single individual from even the most circumscribed culture will display any or all of the features commonly associated with it (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). Thus, any ste-

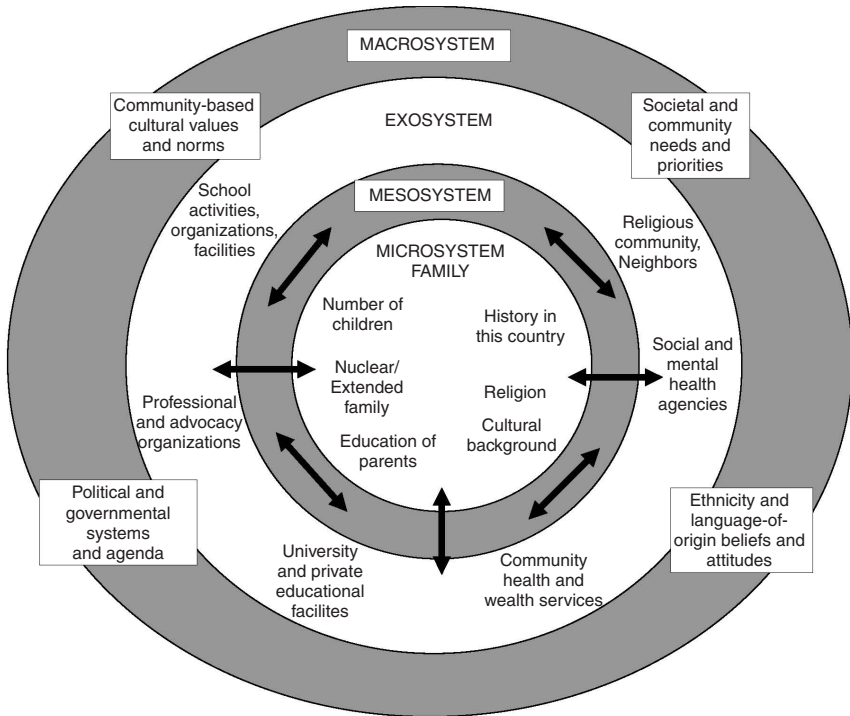
reotyping could harm the parent-school relationship. Misunderstandings often occur when we fail to include the multiple dimensions of each individual's ecological context.

***AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS
WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES***

As stated previously, the changing demographics in the United States require new approaches to involving families in schools in ways that make them feel welcome and ensure that they perceive the importance of supporting their children in learning and developing academic and social skills. This challenge to schools, professionals, and government officials can be better met when using ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) to conceptualize and provide services. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) in *Schools and Families* explain that, as posited by Bronfenbrenner, an individual is an inseparable part of an interrelated system composed of a micro-system, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. We use an ecological model to explain parent-school partnerships, placing the family at the central part of the system (from school, community, etc.) and in relation to the whole system. Figure 1 presents an ecomap that represents the conceptualization deemed most appropriate when analyzing family-school partnership issues and solutions.

As Figure 1 illustrates, all levels of the ecological system are important for understanding and intervening in parent-school partnerships. However, the macrosystem is of major importance when dealing with culturally diverse families. As Bronfenbrenner (1992) stated, the macrosystem encompasses the concept of "cultural repertoire of belief systems" (p. 228). In the case of home-school partnerships, the macrosystem includes political and governmental systems and agendas, community-based cultural values and norms, societal and community needs and priorities, ethnicity, language of origin, beliefs and attitudes. The microsystem or family (as depicted in Figure 1) includes number of children, nuclear or extended family, education of the parents, religion, cultural background, and other variables. The exosystem includes school activities, organizations, and facilities; professional and advocacy organizations; university and private educational facilities; community health and welfare services, social and mental health agencies, and the religious community and neighbors. The mesosystem represents the relationships

FIGURE 1. Ecomap



This ecomap was adapted with permission from Howard Knoff's (1986) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model.

between the microsystem and exosystem, and their respective relationships with other components of the system.

“From an ecological perspective, home-school partnership needs to be viewed as within the entire community—its people and resources, its demographic across and between groups, its positive and negative interactions and the interdependencies among all these factors” (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999, p. 452). Raffaele and Knoff (1999) emphasize that it is important for school personnel to be interested in the people and resources in their systems; to understand that there are four types of ecological interactions, positive, negative, neutral, and non-existent; and that these interactions are bi-directional. School personnel need to work on cultivating positive interactions. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) recommend a

well-delineated strategic plan developed after analysis of the community's human, financial and political resources. The resulting procedural and managerial strategies can help prevent and solve the problems that impede successful home-school partnership.

Pianta and Walsh (1996) and Bronfenbrenner (1977) emphasize that children develop and learn in the context of the family and that shared meaning must be established over time between the child/family system and the school/schooling system. This statement is most relevant when one tries to understand research that reveals that some children fail in school because of the discontinuity between home and school (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The following case study of family-school interactions involving Hmong parents illustrates how the ecological framework can be applied when home-school communication has broken down.

**CASE STUDY:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH
WITH A HMONG FAMILY**

The following is an individual case study that applies the ecological and multicultural perspectives previously discussed. The case took place in an urban public school setting. The assistant principal, classroom teacher, and Hmong interpreter had been waiting over a half an hour for a conference with Kao's parents, recent immigrants from Southeast Asia. The assistant principal and the teacher became frustrated because the parents had already missed two conferences. The teacher was sure that the parents were informed about the conference as she had sent home a note in both English and Hmong. When the interpreter telephoned the home, she learned that the parents felt badly because they misread the time of the conference and rescheduled the meeting.

At the next scheduled meeting, the assistant principal and the classroom teacher greeted Kao's mother and father warmly and offered to shake hands with them. However, Kao's mother seemed reluctant to shake hands with the assistant principal while Kao's father seemed hesitant to shake hands with the teacher. Both of them avoided direct eye contact with the school personnel. During the conference, the assistant principal and classroom teacher did most of the talking. The parents just sat there listening to the interpreter. Their answers to questions were very limited, leaving the assistant principal and the classroom teacher wondering why the parents responded to them in this way.

Individual Case Analysis from an Ecological Perspective

From an ecological perspective, various levels of the eco-system in this case need to be considered, including cultural, linguistic, historical, individual style, and socioeconomic factors. At the macrosystem level, the recent immigrant Hmong parents should be seen in the socio-cultural context of their transition from an oral, agricultural society, to a post-industrial society with very different languages and customs. Based on their country of origin's history, they have been traumatized by wars, spent time in refugee camps, and been caught in the middle of severe cultural conflicts. Being in a new country, they have had to cope with many losses, including that of their homeland, family members, relatives, lifestyle and skills of which they were proud, and social status. They also moved from a relationship-oriented, collectivistic, agricultural society to an individualistic society which the Hmong parents know little about. These mismatches often create problems in a multicultural and multilingual urban school setting (exosystem). School psychologists are frequently asked to help figure out mesosystem problems such as the following: (a) Why some communication with parents and students do not work, for example, why parents do not come to a conference after the teacher has sent three invitation letters home; (b) why students or parents say "yes" to teachers but then do not follow through; and (c) how to solve these and many other problems.

In the case of the Hmong family, there seems to be a conflict of culturally influenced expectations and communication styles between school personnel and parents. The misunderstandings between teachers and parents also reflect typical communication problems caused by cultural and linguistic barriers. Kao's parents' limited answers to the teacher's and assistant principal's questions may result from multiple factors, for example, their cultural role expectations, their lack of knowledge of American schools, and language barriers. In this case, we do not know whether the interpreter even speaks their dialect. As the White Hmong and Blue Hmong can only understand half of each other's dialect, if the interpreter speaks a different dialect, then she can only translate half of the conversation. People from different cultures may use the simple word "Yes" differently based on linguistic differences (consistent with content vs. agreement with the speaker) and/or behavioral norm differences (trying to avoid arguing with authority).

Several other cultural and linguistic barriers are embedded in this case. For example, teachers expect parents to come to school activities

or conferences and to help with homework. However, many Hmong parents do not read English or Hmong (they are from an oral culture), do not have formal schooling, and have difficulty finding babysitters. In addition, in mainstream American culture, teachers take shaking hands as a gesture of friendliness, but in the Hmong culture, women are not used to shaking hands with men. Making eye contact in mainstream American culture is expected in a conversation; in Hmong culture, making eye contact is not encouraged when communicating with an authority figure. In mainstream American culture, teachers expect parents to talk freely; in Hmong culture, teachers are seen as experts and authorities, and parents are expected to listen. All these cultural explanations may apply to the case of cross-cultural communication with Kao's parents.

The acculturation factor in the microsystem also needs to be examined. Parents, such as Kao's, who are at a lower level of acculturation, may be more likely to communicate in their ethnic style than peers at a higher level of acculturation. Thus, school personnel need to reach out to Kao's parents in a Hmong way. Furthermore, when discussing Kao's school adjustment issues with the parents, we cannot neglect the effect of acculturative stress. During the process of acculturation from Hmong to mainstreamed American culture, the Hmong family structure is changed partially due to the different pace of acculturation among family members, including learning English as a second language. Children often acculturate faster than parents because their attendance at American schools provides them with more opportunities to speak English and learn about the American systems. As a result, children often have to act as interpreters and liaisons between parents and school or community. These role reversals make parents, especially the father, lose power and authority. Very often, parents do not know what is going on in school and they are manipulated by the child, leaving the parents feeling powerless. It is often difficult for fathers to cope with the reversed roles in the family as they come from a patriarchal society. The child also can feel torn and frustrated because he or she often has to shift back and forth between the two conflicting cultures of home and school, a process which involves adjusting to different values, lifestyles, expectations, and concepts of children's rights. Awareness of such culturally related adjustment issues is crucial for working effectively with Kao and her parents.

Interventions from an Ecological and Multicultural Perspective

To improve the home-school communication and interaction (i.e., to solve the problems in the mesosystem), the school started by building multicultural awareness and competencies among school personnel (to bring changes to the exosystem) through the following interventions:

1. Providing a culturally competent staff member to consult with the school administrators and teachers and to share an ecological view of the presenting problems.
2. Conducting in-service workshops to help administrators, teachers, and other staff increase their cultural competency in working with Hmong people, including cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills. Teachers are encouraged to reach Hmong parents and students in a Hmong way, for example, by asking a Hmong-speaking teaching assistant to telephone parents in addition to sending letters home.
3. Encouraging school staff to gather information on Hmong culture through research and contact with Hmong children, parents and teaching assistants.
4. Encouraging teachers, parents, and students to learn from each other, mutually respect and adapt to each other, and organize multicultural fairs, breakfasts, or gatherings on topics of interest to parents, such as parenting in different cultures, coping with acculturative stress, etc.
5. Providing English classes for parents and Hmong language classes for children and school personnel, to bridge the communication gap.
6. Including the history and culture of Hmong in the curriculum, and ethnic story telling and writing in bilingual classes, to bridge the cultural gap.
7. Offering workshops to empower parents to work effectively with American schools on topics such as how U. S. schools function; school structures, rules, and responsibilities; requirements for mandated reporting by school personnel of suspected child abuse; rights and responsibilities of students and parents; free services and resources. In addition, providing workshops and booklets on living in two cultures and cross-cultural parenting.
8. Providing psycho-educational courses for bilingual/bicultural children to address the issues they are facing; increase their self-awareness, acceptance and appreciation of the self and others as bilingual and bicultural individuals; and improve communication skills.

Lessons Learned

The case study and review of literature indicate that, to strengthen home-school partnership, school personnel need to first understand children and their parents in their ecological system and then make school a welcoming environment (Hurley, 1999). School personnel also need to work at establishing continuities between home and school. Such continuities can be built through inviting parents to school, visiting families in their homes and neighborhoods, finding common values and interests that underpin mainstream and diverse cultures, and using them to bring home and school together. The next section presents examples of parent involvement programs that apply some aspects of the ecological model with culturally diverse families.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

In this section we describe several well-known parent involvement programs that are available for implementation in communities and schools. When investigating policies, practice and research in parent involvement programs, the National Council of Jewish Women (1996) highlighted four important considerations for program selection. First, few parent involvement programs for parents of children older than elementary school-age exist. Second, few parent involvement programs have been rigorously evaluated. Third, most parent involvement programs aim to change parents' behavior. Fourth, parent involvement programs for training teachers or changing the way that schools and parents interact are limited. Programs typically require parents to conform to school practices rather than training educators to accommodate to the cultures of the families or to incorporate the views of the parents. Considering these critical factors, the following parent involvement programs were chosen because they focused on parents and reflected the principles of the ecological model to a certain extent. Some of the programs concentrate on specific ethnic/racial groups, are available in different languages, and have been evaluated. Brief descriptions and evaluations are presented here. More detailed information can be obtained from the program developers (see contact information in Appendix A). Practitioners also are encouraged to conduct their own evaluation when using the programs in their respective sites.

School Development Program (SDP), one of the most well-known and widely used programs, was created by James Comer in the late

1960s in the New Haven, Connecticut, Public Schools. This program focuses on changing school ecology through three elements: (a) school governance system which includes parents, teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and nonprofessional support staff; (b) mental health team addressing the whole child (i.e., developmental and behavioral needs); and (c) parent program in which parents participate in social and academic activities at a comfortable level. Using an ecological model, the program's success is dependent upon the support of all individuals within the system and an understanding of parents' needs and views of education, and includes various definitions of parent involvement. The SDP has a substantial history of evaluation and research, both by its own staff and by outside evaluators. Comer Schools have been assessed on a variety of factors at different levels, including school climate, level of program implementation, and student self-concept, behavior, social competence and achievement. Studies of Comer Schools conducted by the SDP and by independent researchers have revealed significant effects on school climate indicated by improved relationships among the adults and students and better collaboration among staff (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996).

The Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities program targets ethnic and culturally diverse parents of children ages 3 to 18. This program combines various proven prevention/intervention strategies that reduce violence against self, family and community. Program objectives include increasing parents' sense of competence and involvement in the community, and enhancing the child's self-esteem. The program includes five major components: cultural/spiritual values, rites of passage, positive discipline, enhancing relationships, family/community violence, and community involvement. Materials are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean, with a Russian translation in progress. Evaluation data from 22 parent groups ($n = 357$) show significant improvement in parents' sense of competence, family and parent-child interactions, and child competence. Data from over 1,000 parent pre-post questionnaires indicated an 83% overall program completion rate and 98% of participants recommending the program to others. Sixty-three percent of the program graduates reported increased community involvement, and 75% reported increased involvement in their child's school activities. Parents also reported significant improvement in their children's self-esteem and ethnic identification (Steele, Marigna, Tello, & Johnson, 2001).

In *Building Communities of Learners: A Collaboration among Teachers, Students, and Families*, McCaleb (1994) describes a program in

which she applied the ecological approach to education and building partnership with parents. The program explores home-school cultural conflicts that young children experience through participatory research, in which teachers invite immigrant parents to the classroom for a dialogic process and co-authorship of family books. The process motivates both parents and children to play an active role in school. McCaleb (1994) evaluated the effectiveness of the programs through interviews with parents and qualitative analyses of parents' answers to a series of research questions. Parents' and children's responses were very positive. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) describe the benefits of the program, "In particular, McCaleb's program involves sensitivity to and respect for the cultural backgrounds of students and families, recognizes and values the important contributions parents have to make to the educational process, and engenders parental empowerment" (p. 461).

Massachusetts Parent Involvement Project (MassPIP), developed by the director Joel Nitzberg and his statewide staff, is a joint effort of the Massachusetts Department of Education, Museum of Science-Boston Institute for Teaching Science, Boston College, and Northeastern University. MassPIP's mission is to increase parent involvement in their children's mathematics, science, technology, and engineering (MST-E) education, with a particular emphasis on engaging and supporting parents whose children are underachieving in these areas, especially minority parents. As a result of the joint effort, 58 coalitions have been formed across Massachusetts. The strategic plan for these local coalitions included: (a) creating effective coalitions; (b) involving sufficient numbers of parents in coalitions; (c) developing parent leaders; (d) creating mobile activities to involve parents with their children in non-school settings; (e) providing information and extensions to activities used at home; and (f) evaluating and documenting the activities. Mass-PIP has been effective in getting parents involved in their child's education and in their child's school. However, it has been less effective in getting parents involved in curriculum policy in math and science, especially with parents of elementary school students. Although there was evidence across the state that some parents joined school councils and ran for school committees, there was limited evidence that parents were able to impact curricula changes and classroom instruction (Nuttall, Vazquez-Nuttall, & Landrum, 2001).

The Effective Black Parenting Program (EBPP) targets African-American parents of children ages 2 through 12 with the purpose of fostering family communication and combating juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and other negative outcomes. This cognitive-behavioral

program, specifically created for African-American parents, is taught by making references to African Proverbs which can be used for a variety of purposes. Some examples include, "He who learns, teaches" (Ethiopia) and "Talking with one another is loving one another" (Kenya). Using these expressions with the children enables the program's authors to recognize and honor the teaching strategies handed down from African ancestry. A 15-session program was field tested on two cohorts of inner-city African-American parents and their first and second grade children. Pre-post changes were compared in a quasi-experimental design with 109 treatment and 64 control families. Findings showed a significant decrease in parental rejection and an increase in both the quality of family relationships and child behavioral outcomes. A one-year follow-up indicated significant reduction in parental rejection, along with improvements in the quality of family relationships and child behaviors. There was evidence to suggest increases in social competencies in boys and parental mental health status, and decreases in delinquent behaviors among girls (Alvy, 1994). Over 2000 instructors have been trained and are using the program in schools, agencies, churches, mosques and Urban League affiliates.

Los Niños Bien Educados is designed to enable parents to assist their children with the challenges of growing up in the United States. Its aim is to help parents better manage their child's behavior and better relate to schools so that parents can take a more active role in their child's education. The program presents a wide range of basic child-rearing skills along with "*dichos*" or Latino proverbs used to make the learning compatible with Latino cultural traditions. For example, when discussing discipline, the program used the *dicho*: *A gran mal, remedio grande* (The greater the harm, the greater the remedy). Initial field testing for the program was completed in the 1980s with newly immigrated Latino families and was found to be very successful (Alvy, 1994). Since that time several other field tests have been conducted in various settings. Results from the Retrospective Assessment of Family Relationships Questionnaire showed that on average parents perceived their relationships with their children as much better following participation in the program; those who did not participate indicated that their parent-child relationships were the same or worse (Alvy, 1994). The program is currently used in several school districts and as part of dropout prevention projects.

In this section, we have briefly reviewed six parent involvement programs that are available for implementation in communities and schools. All of these programs apply some aspects of the ecological model with

culturally diverse families. In conjunction with the case study, the programs bring the ecological framework to life. The next section addresses future directions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The changing demographics and review of research necessitate a re-consideration of approaches to parental involvement in education for culturally diverse populations. This section provides recommendations for future research, practice and policy.

Research

Based on review of more than 160 publications, Jordan, Orozco, and Averett (2001) identified four key issues for research and policy regarding family and community connections with schools: (a) clarifying concepts, (b) measuring outcomes, (c) advancing the research base, and (d) identifying critical areas of research. Jordan et al. call for increases in research-based knowledge as well as publishing and disseminating existing research evidence more widely.

A review of research on the effect of parent involvement in middle school student achievement revealed that effective programming required individualizing programs to meet the needs of the students, parents, and community (Brough & Irvin, 2001). Future work is needed to assist parents and families in learning how to create a home environment that fosters learning and how to provide support and encouragement for their child's success (National Council of Jewish Women, 1996). Furthermore, future work needs to take into consideration that parents may not know instinctively how to involve themselves in their children's education and may need to be taught how to create an environment that is encouraging and developmentally appropriate (Quigley, 2000).

Among the many questions that remain to be answered are the following: How should research studies be conducted with bilingual populations? Should study design for mainstreamed populations be replicated with diverse populations with translated or adapted instruments? Should studies focused on the children's culture be conducted with comparison samples from mainstreamed or other ethnic groups or only with their own group? Should new research designs be conceptualized?

Action

The authors agree with Raffaele and Knoff (1999) that to build a driving force for home-school partnerships at an organizational level, one should identify individuals and groups within the school system, home settings, and community who are currently facilitating successful home-school partnerships and could facilitate such activities in the future. Community businesses, social service agencies, after-school and childcare programs, religious institutions, government and civic agencies, and other grassroots organizations can nurture positive partnership between home and school. School systems should do an analysis of their schools, parents, and communities. If the school can identify cultural and linguistic differences, the school can then devise a plan to attract parents to school and to teach the children in more culturally appropriate ways.

Policy

The fast changing demographics of the 21st Century make the involvement of parents in education an imperative. National, state, and local governments need to formulate legislation requiring appropriate training and resources for family and school involvement. To establish true partnerships between parents and schools, the participatory model proposed by Nastasi et al. (1998) is worth considering. The model emphasizes a collaborative process in which partners work together to facilitate individual and cultural change. Partners should share information and decision-making. To remove logistical barriers to parent involvement, schools and local governments need to adjust current policies to make it possible for parents to meet with school personnel before or after school and to provide transportation and babysitting as needed. These factors need to be taken into consideration by educators and policy makers to help schools respond more effectively to the changing demographics of our nation.

CONCLUSION

Families of multicultural/bilingual backgrounds are increasing in number and are predicted to be 60% of the population by 2050, with no one single group representing a majority of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004). It is imperative that school personnel at all levels,

from pre-school through high school, learn how to inform diverse parents about American schools and how to help parents become involved in effective ways, thus providing children with learning opportunities both at home and in school. Teachers and supportive staff, including school psychologists, have to reach out to parents in their community and homes and welcome them in their schools. Effective parent involvement in schools is imperative if our nation wants to have well educated, productive, and effective citizens. The aforementioned ecological model appears to be a promising approach to home-school partnership with culturally diverse families.

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APPENDIX

Contact Information for Parent Involvement Programs

School Development Program (SDP), 55 College Street, New Haven, CT 06510, schooldevelopmentprogram@yale.edu

Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities, Strengthening America's Families Project. University of Utah, Model Family Strengthening Program. Marilyn L. Steele, PhD, 1220 S. Sierra Bonita Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90019

Building Communities of Learners: A Collaboration Among Teachers, Students, and Families. New College of California, 777 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110

Massachusetts Parent Involvement Project (MassPIP), Ena Vazquez-Nuttall, Ed.D., Northeastern University, 209 Lake Hall, 360 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115, and Joe Nitzberg, MEd, LCSW, Cambridge College, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02144

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