There is widespread acceptance that parental involvement is an important contributor to schools and to student adjustment. Consequently, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), with funding from MetLife Foundation, advanced an initiative to develop models to prepare teachers to work with parents and communities (AACTE, 2003). The initiative responded to and advanced findings of the 2000 and 2001 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher which demonstrated the importance of preparing teachers to work with parents in ways that would enhance student learning and development in culturally responsive ways. Five programs were selected as models of promising practices in teacher education programs. Four of those programs are described in this issue of Thresholds in Education.

We begin the exploration of these models by setting the stage with Hiatt-Michael’s article “Preparing Teachers for Parental Involvement: Current Practices and Possibilities Across the Nation.” In her article, Hiatt-Michael reviews the current practices of infusing parent involvement within university teacher preparation courses and suggests a vision for the future.

The first MetLife model highlighted in this issue is the “Northern Illinois University Partnership for Parent Engagement” which introduces an effective and efficient venue for incorporating authentic, parent-involvement experiences within existing teacher preparation courses. Project Podemos is the second highlighted model. Described in Munter’s article, “Tomorrow’s Teachers Re-visioning the Roles of Parents in Schools: Lessons Learned on the U.S./Mexico Border,” this model illustrates the powerful way one university connects students in their teacher education program with authentic experiences in a bilingual/multicultural community. Webb and Krudwig in their article, “Family as Faculty, Phase II,” describe an innovative way parents can be effectively integrated as speakers in instructional modules within a teacher education program. The North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement model describes how cases focusing on parental involvement issues can be successfully embedded within university teacher education courses.

These models are highlighted to provide the readers with the opportunity to learn from those who are successfully incorporating a focus on the home/school connection to preservice teacher education programs. It is our aim that each article will both raise the level of awareness about how to prepare teachers to engage parents and provide practical ideas and resources to accomplish that goal.
Preventing Teachers for Parental Involvement: Current Practices and Possibilities Across the Nation

Diana B. Hiatt-Michael
Pepperdine University

Promise and the Practice

Parent involvement is considered a key element of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), but teacher education institutions minimally address this element in their programs. Faculty in these institutions reveal that the political stress on standards and testing forces other important topics, such as working with parents, out of their curricula (Hiatt-Michael, 2003). Beginning teachers are not naturally armed with the knowledge and skills to work with parents. There is a faulty notion by national and state policymakers that teachers primarily educated in content areas arrive in schools with the capability to effectively work with children and other adults. These new teachers cry for help with student classroom discipline and dealing with these students' families: "How do I get to know my children and their families so that I can be an effective teacher?"

Current interviews with teacher educators indicated that the demand to incorporate parent involvement issues within the preservice, teacher-education program comes from the field (J. Bach, J. Buffehr, B. Fiske, J. Konzal, C. Lampe, M. Sandy, personal communication, April-May, 2003). They shared that new teachers continually report to the colleges and universities that they are experiencing problems with parents and recommend that skills to deal with parents be included in preservice programs. Still, national press and state priorities shove standards and testing to the forefront and these other important issues to the background.

Outstanding teachers, such as those selected for the Milken Teaching Award, regularly communicate with the families of their students. These teachers acquired a value of home-school communication because experience revealed that understanding the family was the underpinning to effective work with the child. Beginning teachers should be armed with strategies to work with parents so that a few angry parents do not deter them from the vocation of teaching. This is especially true for teachers who enter classrooms in which the children and parents belong to a culture different from that of the teacher. Teachers facing classroom diversity have to possess knowledge and skills to examine the diversity and select appropriate ways to honor that diversity (Shiring, Contreras, & Ayala, 2000).

The monograph, Promising Practices for Family Involvement in Schools, developed by the Family School Community Partnerships Special Interest Group of the American Educational Association, presents a wide array of practices that are utilized in schools across the country (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). However, most faculty in teacher preparatory programs address only the traditional parent conference and limited legal requirements for parent interaction (Hiatt-Michael, 2003).

Each year, as voices resounding in an empty room, reports are generated that increasingly support the positive effects of parent involvement on student achievement and satisfaction with schools (Epstein, 1996; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Moles, 1999; Sarason, 1995; Shartrand et al., 1997; Simon, 2001). For example, Henderson and Mapp (2002) in A New Wave of Evidence synthesize major historical and recent...
research on parent involvement. This report is filled with data to support parent and community involvement within schools and to argue that teachers should be educated to work with parents. The cumulative evidence across the years notes that teachers’ efforts to involve families promote the following:

(a) better student attendance,
(b) higher graduation rate from high school,
(c) fewer retentions in the same grade,
(d) increased levels of parent and student satisfaction with school,
(e) more accurate diagnosis of students for educational placement in classes,
(f) reduced number of negative behavior reports,
(g) and most notably, higher achievement scores on reading and math tests.

These benefits are noted in studies across age, ethnic and cultural groups and different types of schools.

The American Association of Schools and Colleges for Teacher Education (AECT) joined with the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (2002) to support the National Summit on Parent Involvement in Teacher Education in Washington DC. The PTA (1998) has prepared and widely disseminated their national standards for parent involvement programs. These standards are endorsed or supported by all state departments of education and 76 national education organizations. This summit provided a showcase for the teacher education, model programs to share their experiences and research. These featured programs provided exciting contextual experiences for preservice and beginning teachers to work alongside parents and families.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) urge that universities include parent involvement issues in teacher education programs. However, most beginning and experienced teachers are not provided with such understanding to effectively institute parent involvement activities. As noted earlier, university faculty report that parent involvement skills are considered a missing but needed requirement in follow-up assessments by their teacher graduates.

Historical Background and Support

Based on the large emerging body of research, the National Education Goals and the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) in 1994 brought the importance of parent involvement to the forefront in schools and school districts. The eighth goal in National Education Goals supports “school partnerships that will increase parent involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). IASA requires that districts that receive more than $500,000 per year must allocate 1% of those funds for parent involvement activity. This provision was reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act (H.R. 1, 2001).

Until the past few years, most state teacher certification departments did not require that teacher education programs include standards or courses on family involvement issues. The Harvard Family Study Report (Shartrand et al., 1997) concluded that only 22 states had parent involvement in their credentialing standards. California was the first state to have enacted legislation mandating that prospective teachers and certified educators “serve as active partners with parents and guardians in the education of children” (California Education Code 44261.2, 1993).

It is the intent of the California Legislature that prospective teachers and certificated educators acquire needed perspectives to serve as active partners with parents and guardians in the education of pupils. California enacted this legislation because parent involvement research indicates higher student achievement and satisfaction with schools and because professional educators and parents/guardians may be from diverse cultures. The law reads as follows:

The Legislature finds and declares the following:

1. The role of parents and guardians in the education of pupils and the development of children and youth is critically important.
2. Active partnerships among parents, guardians, and professional educators are essential features of effective education.
3. Recent and anticipated changes in the conditions of childhood and adolescence, including, but not limited to, the changing family structure and ethnic and cultural diversity, make it more critical than before that partnerships among parents, guardians, and professional educators be effective.

This California legislation formally initiated a review of standards and requirements that beginning teachers should possess in order to actively work with parents at their respective future school sites. In Spring 1999, the California Department of Education
completed the publication of two documents, (a) *Preparing Educators for Partnerships with Families* and (b) *Joining Hands*, to be used by the colleges and universities that prepare future teachers (1998; Ammon, 1999; Ammon et al., 1998).

Gray's (2001) review of American states' laws and administrative mandates suggest that 41 other states have in-place or proposed requirements that preservice teachers learn to work with parents, families, and the community. The states' teacher-credentialing bodies added a parent and community involvement component to teacher education standards or adopted the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards that include such standards for working with parents and the community. This is an increase from the 1994 survey that indicated 22 states, including California, required parent involvement for teacher certification (Shartrand et al., 1997).

Statements from Missouri, Alaska, and Michigan teacher credentialing requirements represent these administration requirements. In Missouri, state performance standards include the requirement that candidates for teacher certification complete a program of content that helps a teacher to seek “opportunities to develop relationships with parents and guardians of students, and seeks to develop cooperative partnerships in support of student learning and well-being” (Missouri, 1999).

In Alaska, the administrative code states the following:
A classroom teacher should be able to work as a partner with student families and with the community. A teacher who meets this goal should be able to:
1. promote clear, two-way communication among the school, student families, and the community,
2. support comprehensive programs for parental involvement,
3. help student families support their children's learning efforts,
4. participate in the community,
5. and connect school and classroom activities with students, work places, and the community. (Alaska Teacher Education Standards, 4 AAC 04.200, 2001)

In Michigan, the state applies standards for the Michigan Consolidated State Plan (1993) and NCATE standards, which include the requirement that programs include new teachers' ability to “foster relationships with school colleagues, parents and families, and agencies in the large community to support student learning and well-being” (NCATE, 2001, p.18).

**Surveys from USA Teacher Education Institutions on Parent Involvement Issues**

**Overview and Purpose**

Two recent studies on parent involvement in teacher education present the most geographically comprehensive overview to date: one on all California universities with teacher education programs (Hiatt-Michael, 2000) and the other on selected public and private universities (n=150) across the USA (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

To determine the extent of parent involvement issues in K-12 teacher education programs in the nation, a representative survey of 147 universities with teacher education programs tapped department chairs or deans of private and public institutions in each of the 50 states. Two public and one private university that granted teacher credentials or licenses were selected from each state except California. For each state, one selected public university represented a major teacher-credential granting institution; and the other public university represented a smaller teacher-credential granting institution. Two states did not have a private university that granted teacher credentials, and one state had only one public institution that granted teacher credentials. The total sample included 147 universities and colleges across the 50 states. In 2000, Hiatt-Michael surveyed all California universities that had a teacher education program. Fifty-three out of the 66 institutions that grant the California basic teaching credential responded to the survey. The responses included 33 (91.7%) private universities and 20 (66.7%) public universities. Three California institutions' responses from a 2000 survey of all California institutions were randomly chosen in the same manner and added to the national responses.

This study addressed a central research question: How do universities and colleges in the United States incorporate parent involvement into the preservice teacher education curriculum according to separate courses, inclusion within existing courses, types of learning experiences, and kinds of instructional methods employed within university or college classroom? The survey raised questions on the number of courses, types of courses, topics, and class instructional methods.
Findings

Ninety-six (65%) of the teacher education institutions from all 50 states responded to the survey. Two-thirds (65.6%) of the respondents were public institutions, and one-third (34.4%) were private institutions. The surveys were completed by the appropriate chairs or department heads for teacher education. These individuals were full-time education faculty. Therefore, these findings seem to possess validity representative of teacher education programs in universities and colleges in the United States.

Of the 96 who responded to the survey, 7 universities or colleges in diverse locations across the nation replied that they did not incorporate parent involvement into any existing course nor did they offer a separate course on parent involvement. Four of the 7 were public universities, and 3 were private colleges.

Twenty-two universities stated that they offered a separate course in parent involvement. Follow-up telephone calls to these institutions indicated that these special, parent involvement courses (one- to three-unit courses) seemed to be required for special education or early childhood education students. These courses tended to be available to elementary and secondary teacher credential students as elective courses.

Therefore, only a few basic credential students might participate in such a course.

Ninety percent (n=86) of the responding institutions reported that home-school partnership issues are included within existing courses. Table 1 expresses the rank order of courses by number of institutions that responded. Universities reported a range from 2 to 20 courses; the mode was five courses. Fifty-six percent of the institutions identified special education as the course that most frequently included parent involvement issues (See Table 1). Reading methods and instructional methods were ranked second and third, respectively, by 46% and 42% of the respondents. Thirty-nine percent and 36% of the institutions, respectively, ranked historical/societal foundations, human development, and cultural diversity courses as courses including parent involvement issues. Less than a third of responding institutions reported including parent involvement issues in courses in educational psychology, curriculum development, student-teaching, and mathematics methods. Several institutions did not have a course in second language acquisition; thus, that course was ranked last. One respondent wrote that parent involvement was not part of the secondary teacher, credential program curriculum.

Table 1. Rank Order of Number of Universities Responding to Courses that Include Parent Involvement (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reading Methods</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instructional methods</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Historical/societal foundations</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Human development</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural diversity</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Educational psychology</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Curriculum development</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Math methods</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Second language acquisition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Rank Order by Number of Universities Regarding Types of Parent Involvement Activities (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Parent Involvement Activity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parent conferences</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dealing with parent concerns</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parent newsletters</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Home reading</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Parent/student advocacy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Including parents in classroom instruction</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Homework hotline</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sixty-five percent of the responding universities reported that parent conferencing concerns were incorporated within existing courses as noted in Table 2. The next most frequently reported activities included dealing with parent concerns (39%), parent newsletters (36%), and community service (32%). Less than onethird of responding universities indicated students were participating in parent interviews (30%), home reading (22%), home visits (18%), parent/student advocacy (18%), and activities for parents within the classroom (17%).

Case studies were the most frequently mentioned instructional method used to acquire parent involvement knowledge and skills. As can be seen in Table 3, forty-nine of 96 universities (51%) reported that students utilized case studies in one or more courses. Other instructional methods were research studies (40%), role-playing (40%), conflict resolution (32%), project creation (24%), and home surveys (15%).

Table 3. Rank Order by Number of Universities Utilizing Selected Instructional Methods to Teach Parent Involvement (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Instructional Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research studies</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Role-playing</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Project creation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Home surveys</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other types of instructional methods mentioned were unit planning (n=12), student presentations (n=10), service learning activities (n=7), reading discussion with parents (n=6), and reader’s theater (n=5). Other single suggestions included having a parent panel in class, implementing an on-site family activity program, and planning a parent-teacher conference. A review of the findings indicated that, across the states, there is little variation in the types of parent involvement activities and the courses into which such parent involvement issues are included.

Conclusions and Implications

Public and private universities across America offering basic teacher credentials tend to incorporate parent involvement issues within existing courses. The findings appear to be encouraging in 2001 because 90% of responding universities share that they are implementing parent involvement issues in basic teacher education programs and utilizing existing courses. However, this is tempered by the finding that, except for the special education course, less than half of the universities reported including parent involvement issues in other courses. See Shumow’s article in this issue to read about one way that parent involvement issues can be incorporated across the teacher education curriculum. Universities in Hawaii and California—locales with a high proportion of diverse ethnic groups—reported the greatest number of courses that included parent involvement issues.

Although the press for parent involvement in teacher education is impacting teacher education curriculum across the United States, this emphasis is under the shadow of the urgent press for standards and testing. Within teacher education institutions, it is interesting to observe that the powerful factor of parental involvement on student school performance gets little emphasis in the teacher education curriculum compared to standards, testing, and use of technology in the classroom. Although standards and testing have demonstrated little effect on increased student academic achievement and student zest for learning, current political support focuses on standards and testing.

Universities primarily focus on parent involvement issues and activities within courses dealing with special education, followed by language arts/reading and instructional methods. That universities most frequently reported parent involvement issues in special education is expected because PL94-142 has required parental involvement at all levels of student education. That language arts/reading and instructional methods include parent involvement is also not surprising because reading is the highest priority academic skill throughout the United States. Research on student reading achievement reveals that positive parent involvement is essential to student success.

Telephone interviews indicated that university courses in the teaching of reading include preparing student teachers to involve parents in the reading
process. Lessons in the importance of parents reading to their children and listening to their children read are the most frequently reported. Some institutions, such as Pepperdine University, have reading clinics connected to the reading course. In such clinics, the preservice teachers contact and work with parents regarding the student’s reading. For example, in the reading methods class for secondary teachers—a mandated course in California—preservice student teachers serving as tutors contact parents before their first meeting with their student tutee. In this telephone successful program that focuses on parent concerns and perspectives. Fewer than one-third of the universities responded that they utilized any of the other type of activities. Respondents indicated that 22% included home reading and 18% included home visits in their preservice program. These findings suggest that teacher educators are not aware of the academic benefits for children of these practices.

As noted in the 2000 study of California, most teacher credentialing institutions incorporate only selected activities and do not appear to include the

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**Most teacher credentialing institutions incorporate only selected activities and do not appear to include the range of promising practices in parent involvement that are required by real life within schools and classrooms.**

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conversation, they discuss with parents what the parents perceive as their child’s problems in reading and the special interests of the child. The student teachers are to prepare their first lesson with the student based upon that conversation. During the course, they are to share their lessons and assessment of the student with parents on a weekly basis. At the end of the course, they write a report for both the tutee’s parents and school. Tutees in this program may continue to work with another preservice student teacher the next semester using these prior reports.

Universities highlight the importance of parent involvement through activities related to parent conferencing, parent newsletters, and parent concerns. The longest established form of parent involvement, namely parent conferencing, was the most frequently reported activity across universities in California and nationwide. This is a universal practice in schools and thus considered by faculty as an essential set of skills in parent-teacher relations. Many universities shared that student teachers role-play parent-teacher conferences and include conflict resolution between the parties in that role-play.

However, the low percentage of universities mentioning other types of parent involvement activities indicated Goals 2000 has not deeply penetrated the teacher training classrooms. Approximately one-third of the universities nationwide reported dealing with parent concerns and parent newsletters. Webb and Krudwig’s article in this issue provides an example of a range of promising practices in parent involvement that are required by real life within schools and classrooms. Readers are referred to the 2001 monograph, *Promising Practices in Parent Involvement*, created by the AERA Special Interest Group, Family School Community Partnerships (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

The use of computer technology to connect with parents is absent in most teacher education programs. It was disappointing to note that promising new practices of parent involvement as school homework hotlines (n=8) and connecting with parents via email (n=0) were seldom reported.

Teachers participate in acquiring parent involvement concepts and skills through the use of case studies, research studies, and role-playing. Case studies and role-playing are widely employed and frequently connected with courses that are used to acquire parent conferencing skills and in dealing with parent concerns.

The extent of parent involvement issues in preservice teacher education programs appears to be the utilization of one, mock role-playing or case study to prepare teachers for ubiquitous parent conferences. The parent conference is often perceived as a one-way communication in which the teacher is prepared to share school knowledge with the parent (Tunistra & Hiatt-Michael, 2003). The huge task of working with parents is left to the school site. School site administrators, also seldom educated to work with parents, are expected to provide appropriate staff development.
This on-the-job training may simply be ignored or executed “on the run” by a harried site administrator. Half of the respondents reported that case studies are widely employed. They are used to assist preservice teachers to acquire parent conferencing skills, parent advocacy, or conflict resolution skills. For example, several reported that in the student teaching seminar, students select a prepared case study and design a parent-teacher conference utilizing the information provided by the case. Another recommended disproportionate amount of parent involvement attention within university preparation and in school practice. In addition, her work suggested that there is a limited percentage of programs which include other forms of home-school partnership such as utilizing interactive homework with parents, conducting parent workshops, designing and producing class or school newsletters, and planning a concerted, year-long program of partnerships. She summarized that although classroom teachers assert that working with families is important

If teachers do not receive training in teacher education programs prior to entering the classroom, opportunities to acquire such training within the school setting are limited.

that students supply a parent advocacy case that he or she witnessed at the school site and work out possible scenarios within the safety of the academic classroom. Some combine case studies with role-playing. The following is an example from the responses. The students are supplied a case in which the parent expresses concerns or dissatisfaction with the teacher. The students are assigned to work in pairs serving as either the teacher or parent and act out the case. Harris and Jacobson’s article in this issue provides a description of how case studies can be used effectively.

Universities primarily focus on parent involvement issues and activities within courses dealing with special education, language arts/reading, and instructional methods. Most states perceive the importance of parent involvement in special education rather than emphasizing cultural diversity and English as a second language course. This will be an issue as the immigrant population grows throughout the United States. It was surprising how important parent involvement in special education was perceived throughout the country given the demographic trends in immigration and ESL populations across the United States. Pertaining to immigrant ESL families, Munter’s article in this issue describes an exemplary teacher education program which could be replicated.

Comparison to Other Studies

Hiatt-Michael’s findings are similar to other studies reported by Epstein (2001). Epstein also indicated that early childhood and special education receive a little formal training and, thus, possess minimal knowledge and skills to work with parents.

Teacher education courses that deal with parent involvement issues and practices do make a difference in subsequent classroom practice. In an assessment study by Katz and Bauch (1999) on graduates from teacher education programs at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University indicated that these new teachers felt prepared and engaged in a diverse number of parent involvement practices because they received parent involvement training in their courses.

Resources for Teacher Professional Development on Family Involvement Issues

Work by Kirschenbaum and Hiatt-Michael summarize numerous promising practices for teachers related to infusing parent involvement into their university instruction (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Acquiring skills to promote positive home-school communication is one of the most critical. These authors recommend that university faculty—as well as teacher supervisors, master teachers, and administrators—utilize case studies and role-playing to familiarize teachers with the intricacies of a positive parent conference. Prospective and new teachers should visit master teachers in classrooms to observe and critique parent conferences. These authors suggest course and classroom activities: preparing a case study on a family, making a home visit, providing home-school literacy programs, preparing a classroom newsletter, attending and participating in a

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school advisory council, and many others. According to those outstanding teachers honored by the Milken Foundation, other activities should include how to effectively gather important information from parents, how to handle difficult situations, and how to connect with parents on the telephone and in person.

If teachers do not receive training in teacher education programs prior to entering the classroom, opportunities to acquire such training within the school setting are limited. California, for example, created the Beginning Teacher Support Activities (BTSA) to support new teachers, especially those who were entering the field with an emergency credential. School districts that experience a teacher shortage have hired new teachers on an emergency credential that requires new teachers to possess only a bachelor’s degree in any area and to pass the California Test of Basic Skills. The majority of these new teachers are not from the same ethnic population as the students and the community. Districts must apply to the state for BTSA funding. Ten to 20% of the BTSA program for new teachers includes teacher professional education to develop skills to work with families and the surrounding community. The amount and types of activities vary with the teacher, school and district needs. Current funding uncertainties have created a sense of ambiguity to the future of this program.

Three national hubs are the most promising sources for information, training, and support for new teachers. These hubs are the clearinghouses for practices, research studies, and policy statements. Schools that connect with these hubs showcase promising practices for parent involvement. The Institute for Responsive Education (2003) at Boston University has researched and promoted parent involvement issues for nearly four decades. This group has promoted family, school, and community partnerships across the nation and every continent. The National Network of Partnership Schools (2003), based at Johns Hopkins University, coordinates a network of schools, districts, and state agencies that adhere to the Epstein model of six types of parent involvement (Epstein, 2001). This group promotes staff development, the creation of site action plans, and assessment at each site. Administrators, teachers, and parents at each participating site collaborate on these activities. At the federal level, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (2003) within the U.S. Department of Education coordinates a diverse range of activities. The agency organizes staff development sessions, collects information on promising practices, and disseminates informative brochures.

Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) located at Harvard University prepares monthly newsletters distributed via email to interested parties. These newsletters provide current information about conferences and resources in family involvement for practitioners and scholars in this field. For example, the Fine June Announcement provided references for course syllabi on teacher preparation, an updated bibliography on family involvement and student outcomes, and a review of research on family literacy (FINE, 2003).

Summary and Recommendations

Although parent involvement issues appear to be included in the curriculum of 84% of university programs in teacher education, the extent of the inclusion seems to be limited at many sites. Beginning teachers report that dealing with parents is an area of significant concern. The research supports regular and diversified parent involvement in school life, but most teacher education institutions appear to be providing a limited number of preservice opportunities to acquire parent involvement skills. These findings suggest that teacher education institutions are not providing sufficient attention to this topic.

Legislation is needed that supports preservice and inservice teacher education relative to meeting necessary requirements to work effectively with families across all 50 states. Specific legislation at both federal and state levels appears to be the next step to foster teacher professional development in the area of working with families.

In addition, the PTA, AACTE, and NCATE should continue to join hands and promote teacher education regarding family involvement. Researchers and practitioners need to consider a variety of means to increase awareness and to implement parent involvement issues in courses. University faculty workshops should be created that provide faculty with specific strategies to implement parent involvement into courses.

References


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A review of the literature provides justification of the importance of preparing teachers to involve parents. Researchers have demonstrated that teachers can and do impact parental involvement (Epstein, 1986) and that teachers' practices have more influence on parent involvement than numerous other factors (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Teachers who take the lead in creating home and school partnerships establish positive relations with parents and foster children's success more than teachers who do not. Unfortunately, most teachers have received little or no preparation for engaging parents during their teacher education (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Moles, 1993). As a result, teachers have tended to rely on instinct, personal experience, or folk theories to guide their encounters with parents rather than principles (Moles, 1993). Current standards in teacher education reflect the understanding that teachers need to learn about parents (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). For these reasons, teacher education programs are faced with the need to develop ways to prepare future teachers to engage parents.

Despite the importance accorded to having teachers involve parents, little prior research has been done about how to prepare teachers to work with parents effectively. One example, a basic issue to be addressed is family diversity. Teachers often need to develop knowledge and understanding of children's background—their families, culture, and communities—in planning for classroom activities and in interacting with students in a way that facilitates student success (de Acosta, 1996). Parents are one source of that knowledge. Teachers also can learn from parents about children's interests, dispositions, and social-emotional development. Accordingly, a case study assignment designed to help preservice teachers learn about the families and the community was embedded in the required Child Development course.

A plethora of research has established that children's school success is enhanced when there is continuity between home and school (Au & Jordan, 1981; Heath, 1982, Neuman & Roskos, 1993). One advantage to the approach investigated here is that preservice teachers build knowledge and skills for engaging parents in the courses that they already take: No new course is added. A substantive advantage to embedding the topic of parental engagement within the required courses is that connections are formed to the knowledge and skills covered in each course. In that way, preservice teachers can envision parental engagement as an important routine rather than as a peripheral teaching practice.

The teacher preparation model presented here considers the different ways that parents are involved in their children's education. Instruction and activities in each involved course pertained to a different aspect of engaging parents in children's education. For
way to create continuity between home and school is to
effectively communicate about the learning and needs
of children. Both parents and teachers want children to
be successful in school (Chavkin & Williams, 1988;
Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Burow, 1995). Re-
search shows that adults are more effective facilitators
of children’s success when they understand children’s
development and learning (Bacon & Ichikawa, 1988,
Price & Gillingham, 1985, Shumow, 1998). Accord-
ingly, the preservice teachers in the Educational Psy-
chology class examined and rated examples of commu-
nications about children’s learning patterns. The
samples they studied came from professional organiza-
tions, university projects, and both federal and state
departments of education. Thus, the samples were
free or low cost and readily available to be used when
they became teachers.

Preservice teachers in the first Reading Methods
course worked in groups to design and present informa-
tion about children’s literacy development to parents.
This served the dual purpose of having them learn the
information themselves and learn to communicate it to
parents. The information was presented both in
displays and pamphlets during the parent/teacher
conference period at the partnership district schools.

Parents often want and need access to information
about how their children are learning within different
subjects. Teachers have the responsibility of grading
children, interpreting test scores, identifying student
needs and explaining those to parents. Preservice
teachers in the Assessment course gained role-playing
experience in these important skills.

Teachers also must be prepared to make decisions
about homework. Most elementary school students do
some homework each day (Snyder, 1998). Parents
expect to help children with homework (Epstein, 1986),
report helping with homework every day (Finney,
1993), and believe this help supports their children’s
school success (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow,
1995). However, some evidence suggests that parents
can become frustrated with homework (Corno, 1996,
p.29; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2001, p. 52). Teachers are
to be sensitive to parent expectations in developing
homework policies and practices. They must take into
account family and community characteristics and learn
to assign homework that facilitates parental knowledge
of the school program and the child’s learning as well
as positive parent/child interactions. Parents’ role in
homework was addressed in the second Reading
Methods course.

Context of the Project

The project and accompanying study was con-
ducted within a Midwestern state institution that
certifies approximately 300 elementary education
teachers each year. The present program was bol-
stered by the findings of a College of Education (COE)
evaluation of students’ experiences during teacher
education which identified the need for students to be
more prepared to “work with parents.” The COE at
Northern Illinois University (NIU) is currently imple-
menting a strategic plan to meet the regional need for
new teachers and for the continuing education of
practicing education professionals. Those needs are
being met through the design and development of
partnerships, standards-based clinical field experiences,
and professional development opportunities.

To prepare our students and to serve area schools,
the COE has developed and continues to develop
formal partnerships with PK-12 school districts. To
reflect the diversity of the northern Illinois region,
partnership districts are located in rural, urban, and
suburban communities. Each partnership district serves
some students at risk for academic failure. The
present program was carried out in the elementary
schools of one of the partnership districts. The school
district had identified the improvement of literacy
learning of students as their central school improvement
goal. The district is committed to engaging parents in
meeting this goal and has included both literacy and
parental involvement as goals for school improvement.
Analyses conducted by a collaborative team of school
district and NIU representatives found that district
students had consistently below expected reading
performance on the state reading assessment over a
seven-year period. NIU faculty worked with district
personnel on several initiatives including this parental
engagement project.

Elementary school, preservice teachers and their
professors participated in the study. Six instructors in
the College of Education implemented activities in their
courses. In total, 129 students taking these classes
agreed to participate in the study by completing ques-
tionnaires and having their work analyzed. The vast
majority of preservice teachers were traditional, White,
middle-class, college students. The class sizes ranged
from 15 to 30.
Description of Project Activities

There were four components of the Northern Illinois University (NIU) College of Education project. The first three components have been completed, and the final component is in progress. The four components were preservice teacher education, practicing teacher education in the school district, a school/family literacy initiative, and dissemination of project activities and findings.

Preservice Teacher Education

This project was designed to embed activities throughout the teacher preparation of preservice teachers. Use of this model avoided having to add another course to the curriculum and was intended to emphasize the importance of parental engagement to education. It also was intended to communicate the multidimensional nature of parent involvement and its connection with a broad range of teacher responsibilities. Activities were embedded in courses typically taken in each semester of the teacher preparation sequence. Altogether, activities were developed for six of the courses required for certification as an elementary school teacher. These courses were:

- EPS 300: Educational Psychology
- EPS 304: Development of the Elementary School Child
- EPFE 410: Philosophy of Education
- LTRE 340: Elementary School Developmental Reading Programs
- LTRE 350: Organizing for Effective Elementary Reading Instruction
- ETR 430: Test and Measurements, Elementary (Assessment)

The activities are described on the website created to disseminate this project (see subsequent section) and are summarized in the second column of Table 1.

Practicing Teacher Education in Partnership District

EPS 512: Teacher, Family, Community: Relationships and Resources was offered at the district high school on a day and at a time identified as convenient by the majority of interested teachers during the Spring 2002 semester. The class involved reading and discussing published articles, presentations by the teachers, and a work time during which teachers designed projects to engage parents and utilize community resources in their classrooms.

The assigned reading included theoretical, empirical, and practical articles. Topics covered by the reading included theoretical models and underlying issues, types of parent involvement, social context of parent involvement, educational activities drawing on family and community resources, outreach and communication from school, homework issues, conferences, and problem-solving. The topics of family diversity, programs to involve parents, and planning for parent involvement were included in the assignments and presentations completed by the teachers.

Teachers prepared and conducted two presentations for the other teachers. First, to expose and sensititize teachers to family diversity, dyads selected a type of family (e.g., immigrants, single parent, dual income, homeless), read about the families, identified special needs of and considerations for engaging such families, and presented their findings to the class. Each teacher also selected a parental engagement program that had been implemented and evaluated. Teachers read, summarized, and shared the program description and evaluation.

One hour of each class period was devoted to a work time during which teachers (individually or in small groups) planned a project to implement in their own classroom or school. Most projects were implemented during the 2002-2003 school year. Teacher projects included several devoted to literacy including improving reading at home, using the local newspaper, and a summer project in which the teacher communicated with the children (reading and writing email messages and postcards). A group of teachers created a website to include information for families before and after their students went on their three-day, outdoor education trip. Several teachers worked on a disability

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awareness project: One faculty member helped inform parents with a mentally ill child or family member about the education and services provided by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and another two faculty developed an awareness and advocacy project about homelessness in the community. Yet another project involved providing information and building a partnership with parents about transition to first grade. A number of the projects are presented on the website.

School Family Literacy Initiative

District, early reading, intervention teachers and I worked together to plan to improve literacy readiness of kindergartners. First, we visited and evaluated other programs in a variety of districts. Two, parent-child, literacy fairs were held during Spring 2002, for four-year-olds who would be entering Kindergarten in Fall and their parents.

We also planned and created postcards to send to all parents of registered kindergartners during Summer. These postcards reminded parents about the importance of literacy readiness and suggested fun and simple activities to do with the child.

Effectiveness of Project

Multiple methods were used to assess the project. The evaluation focused heavily on the learning of preservice teachers about parental engagement since that was the main purpose of the project. Preservice teachers completed questionnaires in four of the courses in which parental engagement activities were implemented.

Measures

Questionnaire. The questionnaire used was to measure preservice teachers' beliefs about how much they knew about how to engage parents in various ways and how confident they were in their ability to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>Observed 2 children, interviewed parents about child's learning &amp; development, home school relations, and home life related to school. Wrote comparative case study.</td>
<td>Increased knowledge of how to interview parents (t = 8.6; p &lt; .001) &amp; learn about families' (t = 5.9; p &lt; .001) increased confidence conducting parent interviews (t = 5.8; p &lt; .001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Psychology</td>
<td>Studied, rated, and recommended communications for the partner district teachers to use to involve parents.</td>
<td>Did not participate in evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Methods I</td>
<td>Created pamphlets and put up bulletin board displays with suggestions for how parents can assist and support children's literacy. Interacted with parents during conference days.</td>
<td>Increased knowledge of how to inform parents what children are expected to learn (t = 4.2, p &lt; .001) &amp; provide specific ways that parents can help children improve reading (t = 2.1, p &lt; .05).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Methods II</td>
<td>Designed homework assignments and accompanying materials for parents.</td>
<td>Did not participate in evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Role-played four different parent teacher interactions including conferences where they explain children's standardized test results to parents and conversations where they explain and respond to parent concerns about classroom expectations and grading.</td>
<td>Increased knowledge how to (a) inform parents about the results of student assessments (t = 3.1, p &lt; .01) and (b) implement a presentation or workshop for parents (t = 2.2, p &lt; .05).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy of Education</td>
<td>Read, discussed, and conducted an interview with a teacher to gain insights into roles and relationships between parents and teachers.</td>
<td>Increased knowledge of how to communicate (t = 2.8, p &lt; .01) &amp; involve parents (t = 4.4, p &lt; .001) &amp; increased confidence to involve parents (t = 1.9, p &lt; .05).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
so. This questionnaire provided a rating on a Likert scale of four points ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items were adapted from those used in published studies (Katz & Bauch, 1999; Morris, Taylor, Knight, & Wasson, 1996). There was also an open-ended question asking students to describe experiences that had prepared them to engage parents.

Three subscales were created from the questionnaire items that preservice teachers completed. Fifteen items measured preservice teachers' efficacy (confidence) about being able to involve parents. Factor analysis provided evidence of the construct validity of the preservice teacher efficacy for involving parents scale. Cronbach's alpha was .89 indicating high internal consistency. Six items measured preservice teachers' knowledge about how to communicate with parents. Factor analyses corroborated the construct validity of those items, and Cronbach's alpha indicated internal consistency (.83). Seven items measured preservice teacher's knowledge about how to involve parents in education. As with the other two subscales, factor analysis provided evidence of construct validity. Cronbach's alpha for the involvement subscale was .79.

Student Coursework. The assignments in each class were read, and content was analyzed by an expert in parental involvement. Indicators of student learning pertaining to the assignment were underlined. Themes were identified and matched to the underlined examples.

Instructor Interview. Instructors were interviewed and asked for their perspective on the project in a semi-structured interview. Instructors described the activities, students learning and attitude, and any difficulties or future changes planned for the activities.

Results

The results from the mixed method design are based on measures collected during the first two semesters of implementation. Questionnaire data was analyzed, and student coursework was coded for four of the six courses that have implemented activities in the teacher education sequence. Instructor interviews were conducted for all six courses.

The questionnaire data was analyzed statistically. Items on the pre- and post-questionnaire that were hypothesized to be influenced by the course activity were tested using paired t-tests. First, the data from all students enrolled in a course implementing an activity was examined to determine whether the students believed they had increased in their knowledge and confidence in engaging parents. Overall, students reported increased knowledge about how to involve parents (t = 5.9, p < .001) and confidence in their ability to involve parents (t = 5.2, p < .001) after participating in the activities. The open-ended answers on the questionnaires were content analyzed—55% of the students identified the course activity as an important preparatory experience for working with parents. Personal work experience was the second most frequent response (41%) given by students as the source of their knowledge about how to engage parents.

Items which measured skills and dispositions that were the focus of the assignment in each class were identified. Table 1 displays the results of the paired t-tests by course.

The content analysis of the preservice revealed that students learned different skills and knowledge within each class. Themes identified in the students' case study assignments completed in the Child Development class were: (a) families can be a valuable source of information about a child; (b) teachers need to involve parents and understand children's backgrounds; (c) parental involvement is multidimensional; (d) families influence children's academic performance and behavior in school in multiple ways; and (e) child development theory/research is tied to school settings. Each of these themes are exemplified by the following examples drawn from student case studies.

Families as Valuable Source of Information

- "I have been pleasantly surprised at how open and willing parents are to discussing their child's particular weaknesses...there is a wealth of information."
- "This situation (observed in the classroom) immediately made me think of the parent..."
interview...it could be, but ... more likely is that he is not interested because he is, as his father told me, an advanced reader."

Teacher Responsibilities
- "Children will come into my classroom with many different histories. I will need to consider all of these factors."
- "Teachers need to be able to communicate with the students' parents."
- "Every child has a chance if we as teachers try to foster it [parent involvement]."

Parent Involvement is Multidimensional
- "So, the parents are aware of what is happening at school."
- "While I was there, two mothers participated in the days lesson."
- "His mother is not as involved in school but is involved in his education. She helps him with homework."

Families Influence Children in Various Ways
- "I saw parent involvement was important in stressing the importance of education."
- "Using the family as a model might be a good way to stimulate child development."
- "The home (of child B) definitely provides the child with a rich literate environment but the lack of .... might partly explain the struggles child A has with reading skills."
- "I have seen how important parents are in the equation to help students reach their full potential."

Connections
- "Being able to talk to the boys' mothers made all of the pieces of the puzzle fit together."
- "The knowledge that I acquired from the text and class has finally sunk in. I feel like I understand the information personally."

Themes also were identified in the philosophy papers. For the student to be most effectively educated, philosophy students believed it to be important to establish, promote, and maintain open communication regularly and proactively between teacher and parents through conferences, phone calls, and newsletters. Students also believed that parents and teachers must work in partnership and respect each other’s responsibilities and insights. Common/shared goals and expectations were identified as important, as was a vital and dynamic connection maintained between the school and the home. Finally, students recognized that the relationship between the teacher and the parent is dependent upon the context of the school and family system.

The interviews with the professors indicated satisfaction with the activities. In particular, the professors noted that their students responded well to the "authentic" nature of the activities. Each professor intends to retain the topic and activities in their curriculum with some modifications.

Evaluation of Course for Practicing Teachers in Partnership District
The NIU instrument for evaluating professional development coursework was given to the District Partnership teachers participating in the workshop on involving parents at the completion of the course. The scale ranges from 1 (very poor) through 5 (very good). Eighteen items measure the teachers' views of the assignments, breadth, instructor enthusiasm, clarity and fairness of evaluation methods, group interaction, instructor knowledge, instructor rapport, learning, and class organization. Teachers rated the course as good to very good. The mean was 4.59 with a department average of 4.34. One item asks for an overall evaluation. The mean of 4.63 indicated that the teachers rated the course as very good. This rating is above the median department rating of 4.34 (in a department that consistently ranks among the highest in university teaching evaluations).

Messages for Practice
Researchers have demonstrated that teachers can impact parental involvement to the benefit of the students, but not all teachers do so (Epstein, 1986). Preservice teachers have received little preparation to engage parents. The model presented here demonstrates that the topic of parental involvement can be embedded in multiple courses with some gains in students knowledge and confidence in involving parents. The model reinforces the idea that parents are connected to and involved in schools in many ways and that engaging parents is an integral aspect of a
The model reinforces the idea that parents are connected to and involved in schools in many ways and that engaging parents is an integral aspect of a teacher’s responsibility.

value and importance of parental involvement and wants teachers to be prepared in this area. Since many of the teachers they hire are graduates of NIU’s College of Education, the district administrators were active in contributing ideas for activities and in helping to implement the project activities. For example, it was district administrators who wanted the Child Development students to study the families of both a struggling and an average or successful student so that they would learn to understand and work with different parental involvement issues. The participating instructors were committed to the value of the activities as well. However, we encountered many time, scheduling, and organizational challenges in implementing the interviews, observations, material distribution, and encounters with teachers and parents. Such challenges need to be anticipated and resources provided for coordinating these activities. The tremendous goodwill that was created with the school district as a result of this project serves as an incentive to colleges of education interested in fostering positive relations with districts.


References

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Tomorrow’s Teachers Re-envisioning the Roles of Parents in Schools: Lessons Learned on the U.S./Mexico Border

Judith H. Munter
University of Texas at El Paso

In growing numbers of U.S. communities, rapidly changing demographics are creating new challenges for the educational community. One in five students in U.S. schools today comes from a home in which a language other than English is spoken (Crawford, 2000), and educators are searching for effective methods for educating the growing numbers of diverse school-aged children representing a wide variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Latino population is the youngest and fastest growing ethnic category in the United States. Recent reports on trends in student growth estimate that by the 2030s, language minority students are expected to comprise 40% of the school-aged population in the United States (Thomas & Collier, 2002); this demographic forecast comes as no surprise to educators in border communities in the southwest region of the U.S.

The binational/bilingual context of communities along the U.S./Mexico border has effectively prepared many colleges of education in this region to work collaboratively with local schools—teachers and parents—focusing on students’ linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds as assets (Nieto, 2003) as they re-envision school programs in response to the promise and the challenges of the 21st Century. This article examines preliminary outcomes from a culturally responsive, school improvement, applied research project conceptualized and implemented at the University of Texas at El Paso’s (UTEP) College of Education in collaboration with a local school district and community. The initiative, Project Podemos (pronounced Po-day-mos), initiated in 2001 with support from AACTE/MetLife, focused on parental engagement as a key component of effective teacher preparation in bilingual/multicultural communities. The project built on strong bridges of collaboration and mutual trust that for more than a decade have linked UTEP’s faculty and students to local communities through various programs.

Background and Context

Project Podemos (Spanish for ‘We can do it.’) is located in a border community, El Paso/Juárez, with a strong network of school-university-community partnerships. UTEP’s College of Education has worked in close collaboration with key local and regional partners (e.g., schools, families, policymakers) to identify and fill the gaps in the educational pipeline by implementing programs of major, urban, systemic, educational reform. These innovative programs have focused, inter alia, on the importance of addressing the key roles of cultural/linguistic diversity and parent involvement in teacher preparation.

In this U.S./Mexico border community where Hispanics make up a large and growing majority of the population (Fonce-Olivas, 2001), educators are acutely aware of the vital role of the community and its voice in developing effective educational policy and practice. Scholars from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds (e.g., border studies, Chicano studies, sociology, political science, education) have examined the uniqueness of the Mexico/U.S. border with a focus on the characteristics of a culture that is neither uniquely Mexican nor American (Anzaldua, 1999; Ripberger & Staudt, 2003; Shirley, 1997; Spener & Staudt, 1998). The fluidity and interconnectedness of border cities such as Ciudad...
Juárez and El Paso is seen not only in family networks but in the constant interchange and exchange between individuals on either side of the border. Persons living in one community often work, have businesses, or go to school in the other community. Movement occurs back and forth among residents for shopping, dining, entertainment, and education. In some respects, border cities like El Paso, Texas, and its sister city, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, may be considered to be one community.

The City of El Paso is part of a rapidly growing binational, bicultural metropolis of nearly 700,000 people, more than 75% of whom are Mexican in origin. It is the fifth largest city in Texas, and rural areas surrounding the urban center are among the state’s fastest growing areas. El Paso County and other Texas border communities also have among the lowest incomes and education levels of any of the nation’s 331 metropolitan statistical areas. A recent study of literacy rates in the 64 largest U.S. cities showed that El Paso ranked last overall (Miller, 2003). In 2000, census figures revealed that El Paso County had the sixth lowest median household income in the nation. Twenty-four percent of all El Paso County families live below the federal poverty line; for children the figure is worse. About 34% of the children in El Paso County live in poverty, compared to 22% in Texas and 16% nationwide (Cruz, 2001; National Center for Children in these outlying areas, especially in colonias (shanty towns) which often lack even the most basic services such as paved roads, water, or sewage (Cruz, 2001; Scharrer, 2002). According to the 2000 Home Language Survey, of the 90% Hispanic population in Canutillo, 75 percent speak Spanish in the home. One hundred percent of Canutillo Independent School District (CISD) elementary school students receive free and reduced lunch. Two hundred and ninety-nine students (10.9%) are recent immigrants (i.e., in the U.S. three years or less) (Canutillo Independent School District, 2002).

A Culturally Responsive Model

While the Hispanic student population has surpassed other major U.S. demographic groups in growth in recent decades. Latinos are arguably worse off today than in previous decades, and the education gap between Hispanics and other ethnic/racial groups is expected to further increase (Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). Among all groups in the United States, Hispanic students have been found to have the lowest rate of participation in early childhood development programs, the highest high school dropout rate, the highest rates of suspension and expulsion, and the lowest college graduation rate (Fry, 2003). At the lower end of the education distribution, the share of Hispanics among high school dropouts is projected to reach 32% in 2010—double what it was in 1990 (Vernez & Mizell, 2001).

Much of the research on Hispanic youth in U.S. schools points to a wide variety of indicators such as family educational background, and socio-economic status (SES) that characterize the educational underachievement of this large and growing group of K-12 students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Valencia, 1997). However, critical educators such as Burnette (1998), Carger (1997), Diaz (2001), and Nieto (2003) assert that researchers need to shed greater light on educational policies and procedures that have institutionalized and exacerbated inequities among diverse groups of students in U.S. schools. In recent years, a growing number of scholars (e.g., Grinberg & Goldfarb, 1998; Noddings, 1995; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997) have written about the role schools can play in transforming academic curricula, support services, and related policies to value diversity and create effective learning environments for students of all backgrounds.

Some studies on the effects of cultural/linguistic
become fluent in more than one language are more positive ethnic identity as they acculturate and who establish meaningful roles in reforming and transforming their children’s educational experience is evident. The primary goal of this applied research project was to build mutual trust and respect between teachers and parents in a predominately immigrant community.

The potential for families of diverse backgrounds to play meaningful roles in reforming and transforming their children’s educational experience is evident. The importance of integrating parents and communities into educational programs and processes has been well established (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lunenburg & Irby, 2002; Mapp, 2002) as an important foundation for school success for all children. However, the alienation of family members from non-mainstream and/or disenfranchised populations continues to predominate, particularly in minority, non-English speaking communities. Many school teachers have little or no understanding of diverse students’ backgrounds/cultures and define non-mainstream children primarily in terms of deficiencies. The concomitant low expectations of educational leaders add significantly to the set of barriers that impede these children from developing their full potential in schools and discourage parents from engaging directly in school activities (Garcia, 2000; Pang & Branch, 2001; Scribner & Scribner, 2001).

The primary goal of this applied research project was to build mutual trust and respect between teachers and parents in a predominately immigrant community. Affirming the diversity (Nieto, 2000) of the school’s linguistically/culturally diverse students and families was the foundational premise of all project activities. This approach recognizes that parents have unique perspectives, knowledge, and skills that can contribute significantly to their children’s success in school. Project Podemos enabled future educators to engage in processes of collaborative inquiry, listen to and appreciate the voices of their students’ families, and participate actively in processes of school improvement having their own educational goals and vision expanded and transformed. Together, educators and parents were able to effectively plan new strategies, analyze and interpret data, and strengthen their collaborative potential to enhance current child-rearing and educational practices.

Project Activities

UTEP has played a decisive role in the local El Paso-Juárez border community and its environs: in particular, the University has played a decisive role in developing initiatives to strengthen strong partnerships with local schools. The College of Education has been integrally involved in many of these outreach initiatives, strengthening numerous community-based programs, forging strong linkages between school districts and college students, and successfully helping to raise expectations for a segment of society that has been underserved. Every semester, for example, the undergraduate curriculum for UTEP’s teacher candidates introduces each new cohort of preservice teachers to the multiple roles of teachers in developing authentic connections with the community in which their schools are embedded.

Learning in the Community

Connecting academics with community experience through extracurricular programming as well as academic study is embedded in the College’s mission and vision. For example, UTEP’s College of Education worked with community counterparts to establish the Mother-Daughter/Father-Son Program two decades ago with the express purpose of empowering young Hispanic women and men. This successful and innovative program has flourished in El Paso and neighboring communities, assisting more than 2,000 young Latinos and their parents to pursue higher education (Tinajero, 1991).

On the academic front, the NIU College of Education’s, field-based program of studies for preservice teachers is characterized by several unique curricular components highlighting research-based approaches to learning from and with the community.

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The program offers powerful possibilities for college students to learn democratic skills through communication with parents and other key partners. The focus on internships and service-learning, for example, prioritizes the community and families as full partners in preparing future teachers for their careers.

Building on the strengths of these (and other) successful programs, AACTE/MetLife supported the development of opportunities for UTEP’s preservice teachers to become meaningfully involved in the culture of effective, parent-school collaboration through Project Podemos. Project participants developed a culturally relevant set of school-based programs within a service-learning framework. The College of Education’s field-based, teacher education program empowered preservice teachers to gain practical, hands-on experience in collaboration with K-12 teachers, parents, and children. Concurrently, the academic coursework embedded in the field-based experience enabled UTEP participants to develop research skills and knowledge—deepening their own and others’ understanding of the vital role of this important dimension of effective schools. University students served as both active participants and reflective practitioners in parental engagement activities, reflecting collectively on these experiences, and helping to re-envision the nature of the relationship between parents and teachers.

Parents, Families and Service

A key component of the culturally relevant framework developed with the community and school became known as the Parent Power Night sessions. These meetings/workshops provided mutual benefits for the school, parents, and future teachers. They included activities that (a) promoted and supported open communication between and among diverse family members and the school, (b) enabled parents to learn new skills needed to assist student learning, and (c) highlighted the diverse skills and knowledge that diverse parents possess—focusing on ways family members could offer their own resources to promote student achievement. The sessions provided numerous opportunities for preservice teachers to interact meaningfully with parents and families.

Communication skills were strengthened as students were paired with experienced educators who articulated the benefits to their work and their schools as a result of parent involvement. Working in teams with mentors and role models, preservice teachers developed content-based teaching/learning strategies to help parents learn to support children’s academic achievement goals at home. Concurrently, future teachers learned much from parents as they attended carefully to the ideas and perspectives that these women and men shared with them (Carger, 1997).

An additional component of the program was the Even Start service-learning project. This activity consisted of biweekly sessions of collaborative learning with a school-based, family literacy program (Even Start). College students were participant-observers as they helped mothers and preschool children in the Canutillo area to learn basic technology and literacy skills. This component of the project gave teacher education students opportunities to understand many of the unique qualities of these parents on the U.S./Mexico border, to identify with some of the issues faced by parents with low levels of literacy and/or fluency in the English language, and to develop new knowledge about working with mothers/fathers of young children who are non-native English speakers. While involved in work on this project, students engaged in systematic reflection on questions such as: How has this experience affected your understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant parents in low-income communities? Some of the preliminary outcomes for the college student participants are described hereinafter in the Preliminary Results.

Furthermore, Project Podemos reinvigorated student teachers’ participation in home visits. This component of the project was an outgrowth of some of the advanced research findings of experienced teachers and administrators from the professional development school in the Canutillo district. These mentors guided and supervised UTEP preservice teachers on visits to families’ homes during selected times/dates throughout the semester. Each college student was accompanied by a veteran educator who helped him/her...
her reflect and learn from the home visit experience. In communities like Canutillo, family visits have offered a good way to develop respectful school-home relationships on safe, “home” territory (McIntyre et al., 2001). Knowing and understanding young people's outside interests and home routines, and then using this knowledge to inform lesson planning, has helped teachers connect their classrooms to learners' previous experience in meaningful and rewarding ways. UTEP students learned that as stronger connections develop between teachers and families, the healthy comfort level that develops on both sides increases the potential for forging true school-home partnerships.

Communication is Key

Future teachers involved in Project Podemos developed a newsletter and a website to further enhance communication with parents. Some of the problems schools in underserved communities like Canutillo typically face include (a) cultural and/or linguistic miscommunication between school and home, (b) time—since parents and family members' long work hours create difficulties in finding common times for open meetings, and (c) challenges in effectively communicating instructional goals with parents whose previous educational experience has been limited to highly traditional schooling (Hyslop, 2000; McCaleb, 1998).

The use of the Internet and related web-based activities served as one of the tools for bridging the gap to help transform the field-based program of studies into an even more powerful learning experience for all involved. Students worked on developing a bilingual community website to enable educators and parents to increase the frequency of interchanges of ideas, research, and news. Learning to work with the Internet as an educational tool helped connect parents with information sources to continue expanding their knowledge and skills. The ongoing connectivity enabled public school teachers, students, and their families to benefit in diverse ways from the increased communication with the college students and faculty.

Furthermore, the website functioned as a pedagogical extension of class instruction. For example, rather than conducting individual research projects (i.e., in isolation), UTEP students worked in cooperative teams to research topics on-line relevant to the community and its educational concerns. The technology allowed them to disseminate their class projects to provide immediate benefits for others by posting findings to the community website enhancing the potential for parents, students, and others to learn from and with each other.

Each college student was accompanied by a veteran educator who helped him/her reflect and learn from the home visit experience.

Parents and community were also able to participate in shaping the learners’ goals and objectives as they posted questions and/or other pieces of information to expand and enrich the future teachers’ knowledge.

While only a small, yet steadily increasing, number of families have access to the Internet at home in this low-income community, the school’s open-door policy and open lab policies provided access for all parents to make significant progress in beginning to learn and practice the technology skills needed to participate in this component of the program. We fully anticipate that this bilingual website will provide a platform for an ongoing exchange of future ideas and knowledge generation among teachers, future teachers, and parents.

Valuing Diversity

In all of these activities, it was vitally important to recognize and affirm students’ and families’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, religions, customs, talents, and experiences. Honoring these differences has been fundamental to the program’s success. For example, written materials were made available in Spanish and English for all families throughout the duration of the project. Similarly, workshops and other interactions were conducted in both languages. Program activities were scheduled to fit the constraints on diverse families in the 21st Century, and a variety of options (e.g., flexible scheduling, assistance with transportation) were made available to encourage participation from all.

Lessons Learned and Messages for Practice

The college students who participated in this study were enrolled in a required senior-level course on
Schools and Communities that met weekly in an elementary school in Canutillo, Texas. These students drove outside of the city to become involved in daily activities with school personnel (teachers, students and administrators) as part of their senior-year learning experience. An ancillary goal of the Project Podemos experience was to systematically study the potential for enhancing preservice teachers’ understanding and knowledge about family/community relations through involvement in processes of inquiry and field-based experience in schools. Lessons learned from the applied research design embedded in the project are summarized in the following sections.

Research Design

The theoretical framework was purposefully nonexperimental. Many researchers in education operate from a belief system which says that teaching cannot be studied by reducing it solely to behavioral outcomes, summative evaluations, or test scores (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). The methods used were inductive: they let the problem emerge from the data, taking into account the contextual nature within which both researchers and the research phenomena exist (Lancy, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002).

As an active participant in the program, I was often able to observe and record relationships, processes, and patterns that helped to strengthen the study. I also engaged in interviews with diverse program participants and obtained permission to examine selected school documents and records in order to explicate the history and context of this applied research project as fully as possible. A primary strength of this grounded methodology lies in its emphasis on personal encounter with experience and encounter with persons (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; MacLean & Mohr, 1999; Maguire, 1987) in the tradition of qualitative inquiry. Rather than aiming for broad generalizations or predictions, the study attempts to find universality in the particular by focusing attention on the context and activities of one particular group of individuals.

A primary data collection component of the study used questionnaires with open- and closed-ended questions to standardize the survey experience among diverse participants (parents, classroom teachers, K-6 students, and preservice teachers)—albeit to a limited degree. Structured questionnaires, consisting of closed- and open-ended questions were presented to all respondents. These questionnaires (available in both Spanish and English) were administered at the beginning and at the end of the project period. Questions asked college students to rank themselves on knowledge, skills, and beliefs about parental involvement in schools. Each rank-order question was followed by an open-ended, follow-up question to encourage respondents to elaborate more fully on the context and layers of meanings behind their answers. One of the questions, for example, asked, “How knowledgeable are you about the elements of an effective interview or conference with parents? Why do you feel this way?” Students ranked themselves on a scale in response to the first question and then provided additional narrative in their own words in response to the second part. Parents, children, and classroom teachers responded to similarly designed questions.

Triangulation was woven into the fabric of the research design, confirming and checking information through several data collection methods, diverse program participants, and a variety of sources. The research team collected data from surveys/questionnaires, participant observation, individual and focus group interviews, and official documents and archives drawing insights from a sample consisting of a variety of voices, including parents, mentor teachers, and children.

All participants gave full permission for their words to be used and published in this study. We agreed that pseudonyms would be used to preserve the anonymity of all persons involved in the applied research study. Furthermore, each individual had the right to review and approve the transcripts and the final draft of the study.
Table 1. College Students’ Responses to Parent Involvement Questionnaire: Percentage Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student response</th>
<th>*Pre-test score</th>
<th>**Post-test score</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel knowledgeable about the elements of an effective parent interview or conference.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>+16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel that I am prepared to develop a parent involvement plan for my classroom</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>+12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel knowledgeable about the elements of effective workshops for groups of parents.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>+29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel knowledgeable about successful strategies for involving parents in school activities of their children.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel knowledgeable about the potential advantages and challenges of parental involvement in the school activities of their children.</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I believe that I can make a difference in the lives of the students who will be enrolled in my class(es).</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n = 45; **n = 36

Preliminary Results

Following in Table 1 are summarized results (raw percentages) from students’ self-rankings on the questionnaires. The table of frequencies is followed by excerpts from students’ own words about the meanings and interpretations that they gleaned from their experiences with the project.

These preliminary results seem to indicate that students’ perceptions of their primary areas of development focused on their own growth in knowledge of strategies, techniques, and operationalization of parent involvement programming (questions 1-4). The most substantial change (+29%) was reflected in response to the question about their understanding and knowledge of the essential elements of effective workshops for parents. The data indicate that these students felt that their active involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of project activities such as Parent Power Night sessions, coupled with academic readings and assignments, played a major role in this successful learning experience for undergraduate students.

I feel that I have had the practice this semester and I could now handle an effective interview or conference with parents.
(Susana, UTEP student)

A key aspect of the learning experience for these students was their active participation in a school with both challenges and success stories that they could relate to their own realities. The field-based learning component of this program emphasized the process of learning rather than focusing on prespecified, measurable behavioral outcomes. Experiential education, as a theory of learning, differs from the more traditional view in that it considers knowledge acquisition as a process in which ideas are formed and re-formed through experience (Cantor, 1997).

From this viewpoint, no two thoughts are ever exactly the same since they are mediated by varying experiences. Students’ comments on the role of active inquiry in developing their own capacity for understanding and growth underlined the central role played by authentic experience in the knowledge acquisition process:

All the articles we read, course content, and putting this theory into practice in the classroom during my internship combined to help me feel more prepared to develop a parent involvement plan that I’ll be able to use in my own classroom in the future.
(Oscar, UTEP college student)
The project experience strengthened connections between parents and the college students who were engaged in applied action research processes with the school community. As beginning ethnographers, for example, the college students learned how to listen carefully to parents, value their "funds of knowledge" (Jimenez et al., 1999; Moll et al., 1992; Olmedo, 1997) and concerns, develop a deeper understanding of their potential as valuable partners in education, and document the new knowledge gained from the interactions.

I understand now that I need to get to know what the parents are like. I think I know parents' feelings a little better now and that can help me plan for parent involvement in ways I didn't understand before. (Fran, UTEP college student)

Our study further indicates that the preservice teachers' hopes and beliefs about making a difference and creating change were largely unaffected by this project. That is, 100% of the college students in our sample came into the project with the pre-existing strong belief that they can make a difference and they will change the lives of children and families for the better throughout their career as a teacher. This high degree of optimism and faith in education as a key to a better future has been examined by numerous researchers in recent decades (de los Reyes & Gozema, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000; Palmer, 1998). Our findings point to the discrepancy, however, between preservice teachers' hopes and beliefs about their future roles as educators and their sense of efficacy: Future teachers are conscious of their potential as agents of change for their students and communities. To enable them to fully realize this potential, however, universities and schools should provide opportunities for students to engage in the kinds of learning experiences that will help them acquire the skills and knowledge they need to develop effective, school-home, collaboration initiatives.

The lessons learned from Project Podemos show us that carefully structured academic and field-based experience can be combined effectively to help future teachers acquire the tools that will enable them to begin their professional career with a good understanding of the significance of school-community-home linkages.

I have learned that parents are our partners in education; we cannot do the best job we are capable of doing without the support of the students' parents. . . . In this community, and many others like it in the border region, parents are afraid or intimidated to speak with teachers. One of our jobs as teachers will be to make parents feel welcome...
(Sylvia, UTEP college student)

Limitations

While this study should have broader implications for related programs at colleges of education in Texas and other higher education institutions as well as for our general understanding of the dynamics of parental involvement in programs of teacher preparation, this applied research project was limited to one program, Project Podemos. The sample size and response rate of pre-test and post-test administration of this survey were restricted; the applied research processes were embedded into an actual credit-bearing course with matriculation policies, scheduling, and other logistical constraints that had to conform to the requirements of the University's academic regulations.

The lack of time and resources were ongoing challenges for most of the research participants making it rather difficult for them to participate in subsequent stages of the study such as providing 'member checks' of the data (i.e., thorough reading and analysis of written documents). We did, however, guide our study with a participatory, collaborative framework as much as possible; throughout the project, preservice teachers (co-researchers) were involved in decision-making about the research as it unfolded. To a limited degree,

__Future teachers are conscious of their potential as agents of change for their students and communities.__

then, the college students shared in the ownership of the data, were involved in the interpretation of results, and helped make decisions about the use of results in changing the operation of the program.

However, the involvement of parents as co-researchers in helping to shape the design, implementa-
tion, and analysis of this study was exceedingly curtailed, and the study was much more participatory for the college students than for the families. The lack of formal literacy skills has been an obstacle for many, and the situation is further complicated by long work days and limited transportation for many Canutillo families. I regret that my own time constraints made it impossible to translate further segments of the study into Spanish in order to work with a greater number of family/community members as full collaborators in the project.

Conclusions

The applied research project discussed here grew out of real and perceived concerns of participants in a professional development school district on the U.S./Mexico border—including classroom teachers, school administrators, university students, faculty, and parents/families—in the context of growing national attention to parental involvement as a key element in school reform for the 21st Century (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Giles, 1998; Gold et al., 2001; Medratt & Frusher, 2003). Project activities used a variety of interactive, culturally relevant strategies to benefit the school community and achieve the primary goal: Project Podemos contributed to strengthening the foundation for school success by building trust and respect among teachers (current and future) and parents/families from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the research findings derived from the project provide information and insights about the role of future teachers as active participants and inquirers in the processes of school improvement, capable of generating knowledge from their practice, and integrating theory and experience through reflection and critical analysis (Sergiovanni, 2000).

This project focused on the participation of future teachers with parents and community members in asking questions and learning how to learn together in a unique community located on the U.S./Mexico border. In closing, we share the words of one of the participating preservice teachers who attempted to summarize what she learned from her involvement and what she will take with her into her future career as an educator:

"I feel that I can truly make an impact on my students as someone who really cares. I will work hard and be enthusiastic and passionate. What I know now is that I am only one part of the equation. I feel that I can make a difference as a teacher, but ultimately, I will need parental help and support." 
(Maria, UTEP college student)

References


Judith Munter is on the faculty at University of Texas-El Paso. She has been involved in research on educational reform and effective pedagogy for 25 years. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Foundations and Policy Studies from Florida State University. For 12 years, Judith worked as a classroom teacher designing instruction at all levels in both formal and non-formal educational programs in Latin America. Her work with schools and communities led to her active participation in community development organizations in Brazil and Colombia. FIPSE has recently awarded funding to Munter and others to continue the development of the parent/community involvement project described here.
The need to strengthen collaboration between schools and families is a recurring theme in the research about educational reform. Over a decade ago, *America 2000: An Education Strategy* (U.S. Department of Education, 1991) emphasized family and parents as key elements in ensuring any widespread educational reform. Existing research documents the positive impact of family involvement on student academic achievement, improved school attendance, positive attitudes, and other measures of student outcomes (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1986, 1988, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Family involvement is especially important for students with disabilities (Kroth & Edge, 1997; O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine, Taylor, 1998), teachers were even less prepared to work with diverse families than with the majority population. Infusing meaningful learning experiences related to family involvement into every teacher preparation course could help build new educator understandings and reduce misconceptions about families.

Several years ago, the North Florida Personnel Development Partnership (NFPDP) recognized a regional need to strengthen collaboration between schools and families. Housed at the University of North Florida, the NFPDP includes college faculty from five area institutions of higher education, personnel from nine school districts in northeast Florida, parents, and community agency personnel. The mission of the NFPDP is to increase and support the number of highly qualified educators and related-services personnel who serve individuals with disabilities, birth through age 22.

Exit surveys from intern teachers at the University of North Florida consistently identified parent relationships as one of the most challenging aspects of preservice teachers’ field experiences. To address this need, the NFPDP replicated the Family as Faculty program from the Florida Partnership for Family Involvement, University of South Florida. The goal of the program is twofold: (a) to increase understanding by educators of the legitimate and critical role of families in educational programming, and (b) to strengthen professional skills in maintaining positive family/school partnerships.

Parents who participate in the Family as Faculty program are provided training to prepare family stories and messages with other professional development settings.
about their experiences with schools and teachers. Upon invitation from college faculty or school district personnel, parents share their unique stories and messages with preservice and inservice professionals in college classrooms and other professional development settings. To honor their contributions, the NFPDP pays a stipend to parents for the training session and for every presentation they make on behalf of the Family as Faculty program. To date, there are 24 parents in the Family as Faculty cadre.

In their presentations, parents offer first-hand accounts of their family lives and their roles as parents

North Florida Personnel Development Partnership
Family as Faculty: Phase II

NEFPDP Advisory Board

Family as Faculty Pilot Project 2000-2001

WRITING TEAM

4 Parents

2 NBC Teachers

2 College Faculty

Needs-based Instructional Modules

School District Workshops

Parent presenters

College Classes

Program Assessment

Dissemination:
NEFPDP Info-Link Website
Florida CSPD Institute
AACTE National Parental Engagement Conference
AACTE Conference
AACTE Annual Meeting

Figure 1. Components and Processes of the Family as Faculty Phase II Model

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of individuals with disabilities. Presentation formats include (a) an individual parent presentation focused on the family story/message, (b) a panel of parents discussing issues appropriate to the learning session, or (c) a role-play of family involvement situations with both parents and students taking roles, followed by discussion. Parents culminate their presentations with a positive message on how to effectively involve families in the planning and implementation of educational programs. According to audience feedback, the parents bring passionate, experienced, and authentic stories that seem to affect professionals' abilities to have a more complete understanding of how disabilities impact families.

Project Description

Funding from the AACTE-Metropolitan Life Foundation Parental Engagement Project allowed the NFPDP to extend the Family as Faculty program to Phase II in which parents collaborated with local practitioners and college faculty to design instructional modules that could be incorporated within the context of general education, special education, and related services coursework. NFPDP partners requested that the modules be designed to address parent/family perspectives on a range of issues that challenge teachers and parents. In addition to offering the modules to college classes, the partners suggested that they be available to school districts to use as inservice training for practicing professionals. In response to these requests, the following objectives were identified to guide the project:

(1) Create a collaborative writing team.
(2) Develop two instructional modules.
(3) Inform NFPDP partners about instructional modules and opportunities to present information in university and school district settings.
(4) Present instructional modules which can be incorporated within the context of general and special education coursework or presented as workshops and inservices for school districts.
(5) Assess effectiveness and feasibility of Family as Faculty Phase II process and the content and presentation of the instructional modules.
(6) Disseminate project information about the project's process and products to local, state, and national audiences.

Figure 1 on the preceding page presents the Family as Faculty Phase II model followed by the discussion of the steps involved in the development and implementation of the project.

The Family as Faculty Phase II writing team included four parents from Family as Faculty, one parent from Family Network on Disabilities (FND) of Florida, two teachers with National Board Certification (one from a rural district and one from an urban district), a teacher who was preparing for National Board certification, and two college faculty. These individuals initially formed a focus group to explore what was already known about the topic of family/school partnerships and to identify a variety of topics as possible themes for the instructional modules. Through further discussion, the group then prioritized the topics and selected a theme for each of two instructional modules.

The first theme was family involvement in individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings. The IEP is an essential tool for guaranteeing that students with disabilities receive the special education services they need (Smith, 2001). Given the group's concern over the apparent disenfranchisement that many families experience with the IEP process, they concurred that a module with this theme would assist collaborative

Table 1. Composition of the Writing Team for Each Family as Faculty Phase II Instructional Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Modules</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close Encounters of Four Kinds – IEP Meetings: Building the Foundation for Developing Partnerships with Families</td>
<td>2 Family as Faculty parents 1 Family Network on Disabilities parent 1 National Board Certified teacher (rural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships</td>
<td>2 Family as Faculty parents 1 National Board Certified teacher (urban) 1 teacher preparing for National Board Certification (urban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both modules</td>
<td>Two college faculty served both teams as facilitators. NFPDP staff provided technical support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
efforts among teachers and families.

The second module's theme was building positive relationships with families. The group shared consensus that the quality of parental involvement in the educational life of students could be supported through a module with this focus. Finally, the group divided into two writing teams to develop the modules. Table 1 illustrates the composition of each writing team.

Each writing team met for two-hour sessions on seven days. With technical support from the NFPDP staff, the teams produced PowerPoint presentations and accompanying materials for conducting an interactive, instructional module. The first module, Close Encounters of Four Kinds: IEP Meetings, addresses the importance of family participation in four different types of IEP meetings for students with disabilities.

Through the use of the module, parent presenters invite the audience to deeper understandings about the value of parent input and involvement as IEP team partners. Figure 2 presents three of the presentation slides.

In the second module, Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships, a house is used as a metaphor to represent strong, positive family/school relationships. The module describes each building block that must be in place to establish positive and proactive relationships among families and professionals. The module also includes strategies that teachers can use to increase their collaborative skills as they interact with families. See Figure 3 to view three slides from this presentation.

The designs of the original Family as Faculty project and Family as Faculty Phase II were mutually
supportive. In addition to the prescribed content, each module includes opportunities for Family as Faculty parents to share their unique experiences as parents of individuals with disabilities. Parents from the Writing Team trained ten other members of Family as Faculty, thus increasing the capacity of the project to disseminate the modules.

**Project Effectiveness**

Triangulation was used to test the trustworthiness of feedback obtained to measure project impact. Four sources of feedback were gathered, analyzed, and interpreted: (1) writing team survey, (2) anecdotal comments from writing team members, (3) audience survey, and (4) written anecdotal comments from audiences. First, a 12-item survey invited the writing team to rate the effectiveness of the process used to develop the instructional modules. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) measured team members’ feedback about their experiences writing the modules (See Table 2).

In a one-hour session, writing team members discussed the project process and made recommendations for future module development. Their comments included the following:

"I looked forward to our sessions and am sad to have them end."

"It was a wonderful experience."

"I hope we can work together again in the future!"

"This has been a unique, collaborative experience, working with parents as partners to create a useful product. It is an innovative design and has an outcome that will ultimately benefit the children we teach."

**Table 2. Family as Faculty Phase II: Means for Self-Reports by Writing Team**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean Scores (N=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We created a collaborative writing team.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our writing team collaboratively developed two instructional modules that promote parental involvement in various aspects of special education.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We have planned for the dissemination process to NFPDP's Regional Council (partners) and beyond.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We have planned for presentations of our instructional modules.</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We have assessed the effectiveness and feasibility of Family as Faculty: Phase II process and products.</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We have disseminated information about the project's process and products to local, state, and national audiences.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The purpose of each writing session was clear to me.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The lengths of the various working sessions were reasonable.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The time of day for the various working sessions was workable in my schedule</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The other team members listened to and respected my ideas.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel that my ideas contributed to developing our instructional unit.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. As a team, we accomplished what we set out to do.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“It has been a great personal and professional experience that I have learned so much about the needs of the families of the students that I teach."

“I enjoyed being a part of this team. The variety of experiences allowed us to bring out the best in each other.”

Writing team members shared consensus in making two recommendations: (a) pilot the modules to learn how audiences will receive them, and (b) develop a marketing plan.

The instructional modules were piloted in two graduate teacher preparation classes during the 2002-03 school year. The audience survey included six questions targeting the following areas of professional development: (a) awareness of needs of individuals with disabilities and their families, (b) knowledge of needs of individuals with disabilities and their families, (c) willingness to collaborate with parents, (d) willingness to view parents as equal partners in education, (e) respect for family members of individuals with disabilities, and (f) intention to apply understandings gained from FAF instructional modules to one’s practice. The seventh question targeted the value of the module as an instructional tool. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) measured audience feedback about their experiences with the modules. Table 3 provides mean scores for each administration of the survey.

Respondent feedback from the two pilot groups provided (a) information about the potential value of Family as Faculty Phase II for impacting the beliefs and attitudes of preservice and inservice teachers and (b) confirmation that the instructional modules were well received by project participants. As indicated in Table 3, respondents reported that participation in an instructional module positively impacted their understanding (items 1 and 2) and respect (items 4 and 5) for families of individuals with disabilities. They also reported that participation in an instructional module positively impacted intention to build positive relationships with the parents of their students with disabilities in the future (items 3 and 6). Feedback on item 7 indicated that the parents who presented the modules were both positive and professional in their delivery and provided meaningful instructional material to their audiences.

Respondents also had the opportunity to provide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation in the instructional module</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pilot 1</strong> (N=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. increased my awareness about the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. increased my knowledge about the needs of individuals with disabilities and families.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. increased my willingness to collaborate with individuals with disabilities and their families.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. increased my willingness to consider parents as partners in the educational process.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. increased my level of respect for family members of individuals with disabilities.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. will have a positive impact on my relationships with parents.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. was presented in a meaningful, professional manner by the parents/family members.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Family as Faculty Phase II: Means for Self-Reports by Audience
written comments about the module presentations. Their anecdotal comments provided a final source of data to test the trustworthiness of feedback obtained from audiences.

"I can really see the value of parents' stories. The power of hearing from people who have been there".

"This activity gave me a realistic idea of what you will expect and encounter during a general IEP session."

"This is a great program; it allows the teacher to understand where the parents are coming from, their view and concerns. The presentation allows the teacher to understand that the IEP is not cut and dry, changes can occur, so don't get upset."

"It lets the teacher learn how to have positive interactions with the parent. It helps you as a teacher learn to make parents feel welcome and how to involve them each step of the way."

"This presentation serves as a reminder of the absolute importance of cooperation with the parents and the school."

"It allows you to see things from the parent's point of view. You're able to empathize and put yourself in their place."

"I taught General Education and my IEPs were written for me—that will never happen again since meeting with this parent!"

"I learned from the parents that we are learners too. We need to be open to hear and act on the behalf of parents as well as their children. This presentation was moving and inspiring."

"It helped me to 'do my job better' and really work side-by-side with the parents."

Ongoing assessment of Family as Faculty Phase II will help inform both project impact and future project development.

Next Steps for Family as Faculty Phase II

Evidence from the pilot presentations suggests that the modules have strong potential to impact the quality of teacher preparation programs and the professional development of practicing teachers. The next step is to develop a marketing plan and disseminate the modules to partner colleges, school districts, and agencies throughout the region. This step is critical in light of recent legislation. For example, No Child Left Behind (2003) supports increased involvement of parents in educational decision-making. In addition, recent legislation in Florida outlines minimum competencies for a professional teaching certificate (Florida Teacher Certification, 2002). These minimum competencies now include the "ability to develop and maintain a positive collaborative relationship with students’ families to increase student achievement." The challenge is to make meaningful collaboration with parents the rule rather than the exception in education.

The promise of Family as Faculty Phase II lies in its capacity to contribute to enduring changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes about parents and their legitimate role in the education of their children. As one audience member expressed, "This is the most dramatic way of demonstrating parents' need for love, compassion, and empathy . . . to create the atmosphere that will make communication feasible and effective for the benefit of the student." For additional information about Family as Faculty Phase II, contact the authors at kwebb@unf.edu or kkrudwig@unf.edu. Information about Family as Faculty Phase II can also be viewed on http://www.pdpinfo.HELP.

References


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North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement

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The North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement developed six online modules to be embedded in courses of initial teacher education programs. The modules presented the kinds of parent involvement posited by Epstein (1995) and reflected in the National PTA Standards (1998). Components of the online modules included (a) goals and objectives, (b) lesson plans for teacher educators, (c) case studies, (d) assignments and rubrics, and (e) resource banks. Through the use of case studies, modular focus could be adjusted to respond to different levels of teacher preparation, content areas, and school contexts. The resource banks enabled candidates to view materials prepared by teachers, schools, and school districts for communication with parents. Rubrics assessment of materials prepared by candidates were developed, along with instruments for assessment of candidate knowledge and of attitude toward parental involvement. Five of the modules were pilot tested by six faculty in 10 teacher education classes at two universities. Results of pre- and post-assessments showed improved scores for most candidates. Feedback collected from teacher educators suggested need for revision of the modules to include stronger focus on purposes and on the knowledge bases underlying the modules. Although developers found that the curriculum generally fulfilled its purposes, needs for continuing development were identified in the areas of cultural responsiveness and use in field settings. The focus of No Child Left Behind on school policy for parental involvement suggests opportunities for development of the modules for use in professional development as well as in initial teacher preparation.

The North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement was formed by the University of North Texas (UNT), the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), and the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District (HEB). UNT is located at the northern apex of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, and UTA on the south side of the metroplex, not far from HEB. This partnership was led by the Center for Parent Education (CPE) at UNT. CPE is a resource for parent educators known for online learning tools provided through the Registry of Parent Education Resources (ROPER) and for annual training events. The project reported here involved CPE with teacher educators at UNT and UTA and educators at HEB. Parent involvement is a district goal at HEB, and this priority is reflected by affiliation with the National PTA and by initiatives on every campus. Shady Oaks Elementary School was the lead school for the project. Parent involvement was the top school improvement goal for Shady Oaks in the year of project development.

A major motivation of the partnership reflected the involvement of UNT and UTA with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) 2000 standards which call for teacher candidates to demonstrate consideration of "the school, family, and community contexts in which they work" (NCATE, 2001b, p. 15). Faculty were also concerned that candidates meet Pedagogy and Professional Responsibility Standards adopted by the Texas State Board for Educator Certification in 2001, which required candidate knowledge and skills in interacting and communicating with families. The Texas standards specified that beginning teachers know "the importance of family involvement in their children's education and appropriate ways of working and communicating..."

By August, 2002, the partnership had developed six online resource modules for use by teacher education faculty and teacher candidates in exploring parental engagement.
effectively with families in varied contexts” and that they be able to “interact appropriately with families that have diverse characteristics, backgrounds, and needs; apply procedures for conducting effective parent-teacher conferences; communicate with families on a regular basis to share information about students' progress and respond appropriately to families’ concerns; and engage families in their children’s education and in various aspects of the instructional program” (SBEC, 2001, p. 16). The faculties had more confidence that candidates in EC-4 programs could meet these new standards than candidates at other levels because school-family relations were typically included in their curricula, as is common in this field (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

The partnership focused on parental involvement in initial teacher education programs. We aimed to develop curriculum that was problem-based, that could be integrated across several courses in each preservice program, and that took advantage of the growing capacity of teacher education faculty and candidates to utilize online resources. Working in large Texas teacher education programs, we sought approaches to curriculum and instruction that could be widely implemented. We saw the online resources as offering the flexibility, interactivity, and authenticity (Collier & Minick, 2001; Levin and Matthews, 1997) to enable users to tailor content about schools and families to meet the varied needs and interests of candidates preparing to teach at different levels and in different settings. Epstein’s six types of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Coates, Clark-Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997) served as a framework for the curriculum. This typology also organizes the National PTA Standards (1998) and later descriptions of successful practices published by the National PTA (2000).

The goals of the North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement, as stated in the April 2001 proposal to AACTE/Metropolitan Life Foundation, were as follows:

1. To develop six online, problem-based learning experiences (modules) in parental engagement for use by teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs from early childhood through high school.
2. To field test and revise the modules.
3. To make the modules readily available through the CPE website.
4. To report findings about the impact of the curriculum on teacher candidate’s attitude, knowledge, and performance.

This article reports activities, dilemmas, and findings of the Partnership in achieving these goals over an 18-month period from October 2001 to March 2003. Increasing awareness of the provisions of No Child Left Behind led to consideration, in the concluding section, of the potential use of the curriculum for inservice professional development.

Project Activities

Description of the Modules

By August, 2002, the partnership had developed six online resource modules for use by teacher education faculty and teacher candidates in exploring parental engagement. Following Epstein and the National PTA (1998), the topics of the modules are Parenting, Communicating, Learning at Home, Volunteering, Decision-making and Advocacy, and Learning in the Community. Each module includes (a) goals and objectives, (b) case studies, (c) lesson plans, (d) assignments and rubrics, and (e) a resource bank. The best way to experience the modules is to visit the website at www.coe.unt.edu/cpe/partnership.htm. At this address, current drafts of the components of all six modules are available.

Goals and Objectives

The first section of each module states the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that might be gained by candidates from its use. For example, the goals of the Learning at Home module include that teacher candidates (a) understand the rationale for and common barriers to learning at home, (b) identify ways families may become involved in supporting learning outside of school in a particular context, (c) describe school and teacher practices that support family involvement in that context, and (d) develop resources to help parents in that context support students’ learning outside of school.

Case Studies

Each module includes four case studies, one at each certification level, EC-4, 4-8, 8-12, and EC-12. The case studies feature beginning teachers who are supported by mentor teachers, principals, and often by parents in learning to engage parents effectively. The
EC-4 case studies feature Gloria, an enthusiastic kindergarten teacher. Matt, the middle school science teacher featured in the 4-8 case studies, often bites off more than he can chew. Holly, a high school English teacher, finds that her experiences as a parent of teenagers are sometimes, but not always, helpful. The EC-12 case studies feature (a) Eric, a rural instrumental music teacher; (b) Sue, an elementary physical education teacher; or (c) Nina, who teaches visual arts. Each of the EC-12 teachers appears in two modules. The case studies present first-person accounts of teacher experiences that raise questions about effective practice. For example, in the Volunteering module, Gloria encounters a parent who wants to volunteer more than Gloria can accommodate; Matt conducts a volunteer orientation; Holly fails to adequately recognize a parent volunteer; and Sue organizes a program for volunteer, school-crossing guards.

**Success of the project depended on teacher educator implementation of curriculum.**

Another takes the role of “learning advocate,” constantly assessing whether the stance assumed by the teacher serves the interest of student learning. A third takes the role of “resource provider,” searching the resource bank for materials relevant to the case. The fourth role varies for different modules and calls for candidates to assume roles such as “story teller,” “connector,” or “staff developer.” After discussion of one of the case studies, candidates (still in small groups) developed a product to support parent involvement. For example, in the Parenting module, candidates wrote an article for the school newsletter that provided parents with information about child or adolescent development that had implications for learning. In the Decision-making and Advocacy module, candidates assessed the quality of decision-making and advocacy in the case study by looking at research and/or at state or district policy related to the decision under consideration and revised the case study to reflect what they had learned about retention of a student in kindergarten, referral of a student for a special program, a parent’s role in student selection of a high school curriculum track, or community advocacy for the visual arts.

The lesson plans made reference to assessment tools which, except for the rubrics, were not available online. In addition to the rubrics, we prepared an assessment of content knowledge associated with each module and an attitude assessment based on Epstein (1992).

**One issue was how to prepare candidates for the wide range of practices in parental engagement they might encounter in schools.**

Candidate Assignment and Rubric

The assignment sheet supports the lesson plan by placing in the hands of candidates the role descriptions associated with the case study discussion, the follow-up assignments leading to development of a product, and the assessment rubrics. The rubrics attend to the goals of the particular module but are also cumulative, building on principles introduced in the Communicating module.
Resource Bank

The resource bank leads candidates to websites that offer resources related to the topic of the module at hand. In the Learning at Home module, users may view the homework policies of schools and school districts, the homework help suggestions of teachers at different levels, and sets of home learning activities constructed for various purposes. For example, because Matt is interested in promoting student participation in a science fair, the resource bank includes samples of home communication about science fairs. The bank also includes sample music practice policies related to concerns expressed by parents of Eric’s students. In constructing the resource banks, permission was sought from the owners of the websites referenced.

Issues in Development of the Modules

In February 2002, 16 teacher educators (8 from UNT and 8 from UTA) attended the Tenth Annual Conference on Parent Education of CPE and met with the HEB teacher consultants. Teacher educator participants were chosen to assure representation of EC-4, 4-8, 812, and EC-12 programs. At the meeting, they shared their current practices of introducing preservice teachers to parental engagement topics and previewed a prototype module which was much less developed than the current modules previously described.

Two major development issues were identified through feedback from teacher educators. One issue was how to prepare candidates for the wide range of practices in parental engagement they might encounter in schools. Related questions concerned reasonable expectations for beginning teachers. How could we foster their (a) ability to discern quality in school and staff relationships with parents and communities, (b) respect for parents and their role in the learning of children, and (c) agency for building partnerships with parents? In the end, we decided that the focus of the modules would be on classroom practice as opposed to school policy. We would not expect first-year teachers to change school practice, but to partner with the parents of the students near at hand. The focus of the modules would be on activities that could be implemented by a beginning teacher in the classroom with support from a mentor teacher, the principal, and parents.

A second issue was the need for the modules to address teacher expectations for involvement of parents from diverse families and cultures. The bilingual early childhood teacher educators at our meeting had in their programs whole courses dedicated to working across cultures with families and communities. The modules barely scratched the surface of their knowledge. At the other end of the spectrum were content specialists attracted to our project by the hope of parental advocacy for endangered arts, humanities, or health and wellness programs. The tool we came to recognize for mediating differences in expectations was the use of case studies. A case study focuses on human behavior in a particular situation and context. Case-based knowledge encourages recognition that teacher decisions about practice need to be culture and context specific and rooted in principles such as two-way communication and focus on learning. The use of case studies opens the door to the development of additional cases set in different contexts and of support materials that deepen the ability of candidates to work effectively with families and communities across cultures.

With these insights, we settled on the format for the modules described earlier. Through the pilot testing of the modules, we acquired teacher educator suggestions for their improvement and measured the impact of the modules on candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions. To meet these evaluation and assessment goals, four instruments were developed. The first was a questionnaire for collecting feedback from teacher educators about their use of and suggestions for revision of the modules. The second was a group of measures of candidate knowledge related to the learning objectives of the six modules. To assess knowledge, we planned to develop ten-item, multiple-choice tests. For the pilot stage of the project, we wrote open-ended items enabling us to develop good distracters for assessments to be used in the future. To assess candidate skills, we composed the rubrics for scoring task products. Finally, to measure dispositions, we modified Epstein’s instrument for
assessing attitudes toward parent involvement of inservice teachers for use with preservice teachers (Edwards, 2003).

**Results of the Field Test**

During Fall 2002 and Spring 2003, six teacher educators pilot-tested five of the modules in ten classes required in one of the EC-4, 4-8, 8-12 or EC-12 programs at UNT or UTA. Orientation for the teacher educators was provided at the February 2002 session mentioned earlier. Each teacher educator also received a notebook of all the materials developed. The teacher educators generally followed the lesson plans provided although many deviated from the plans in consistent ways. Each teacher educator devoted one, 80-minute class period to pilot testing one module. They administered pre- and post-assessments of knowledge to candidates and responded in writing to questions about reactions to use of the modules in their classes.

Table 1 presents pre- and post-assessment results for those classes where both sets of scores were available. The table lists the numbers of classes and candidates, their mean pre-test and post-test scores, and the percentages of candidates whose scores improved or did not change. Most of the candidates improved their scores. Being rushed in completion of post-tests at the end of class may have been a factor in failure of some students to improve their scores.

In addition to returning pre- and post-knowledge assessments, some of the teacher educators collected artifacts of candidate learning. Candidates in one class that piloted the Communicating module composed letters to be sent to parents by two of the teachers featured in the case studies and completed rubrics assessing their letters. Candidates who piloted the Parenting module wrote articles for the school newsletter about developmental issues. Their articles included (a) Guidelines for Kindergarten Literacy, (b) Teens may Prefer PJs, about the need of adolescents for sufficient sleep and regular sleep habits, and (c) Only Fun and Sunshine Needed, setting guidelines for a safe and fun, school, field day.

Teacher educators gave generally positive feedback about use of the modules. The instructor who used the Learning at Home module was pleased with the discussion-starter suggestions and the case studies. She reported that although her candidates were previously aware of the importance of learning at home, this module made them see the importance of teacher development of alliances with parents for learning at home and understand that families may vary in their ability to support student learning at home. The instructor who used the Communicating module liked the flexibility of the lesson plan which offered choices for the instructor. She said that candidates learned from the module that there is more than one solution to a problem, that cooperation with parents and colleagues expands the repertoire of the teacher, and that asking for help is often a good idea. The instructor who used the Decision-making and Advocacy Module found the materials informative and appropriate. The instructor who used the Volunteering module in an EC-12 art methods class wrote a new case study based on her experience in coordinating a student art show with parents to supplement the case study provided, a physical education example. Opportunities for positive practice were the feature most appreciated by the instructors who used the Parenting module. In general, the instructors used all four of the case studies provided and added to the lesson plan whole class discussion of small group reactions to the various case studies. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>N Classes</th>
<th>N Candidates</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean</th>
<th>Post-test Mean</th>
<th>% Improved or No Change</th>
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</table>

Table 1. Numbers of Classes and Candidates Who Piloted Parent Engagement Modules in Fall 2002/Spring 2003, Mean Pre-test and Post-test Scores, and Percentages of Candidates Whose Scores Improved or Did Not Change
time required for these discussions may be one reason that not all of the instructors reached the parts of the lesson where candidates apply their learning by developing a product and the post-assessment is administered.

Several suggestions were made for improving the modules. Those suggestions included adding more case studies and providing more detail in the case studies. Other ideas were to suggest ways to spread the lesson plans out over several class periods, to inform instructors how the objectives are aligned with the activities in the lesson plans, and to show the users how the items in the Resource Bank are related to the issues raised in the case studies.

Our sample of instructors was small, and their comments tended to be unique. Still, their reactions suggested the need for more instructor background about (a) the purposes of the modules, (b) the purposes of the components of the modules, and (c) the knowledge bases supporting parent involvement in schools and the role of teachers in engaging parents and communicating across cultures. Also, studying responses to the knowledge assessments, we came to appreciate the sequence, as well as the typology, inherent in Epstein’s model of parent involvement. In this pilot test, candidates typically experienced only one module in isolation from the others. Need for prior background was most evident in candidate artifacts from Decision-making and Advocacy, where candidate responses were often more appropriate to Communicating which does not require teacher facilitation of parental exercise of a right or responsibility to make a decision in the interest of a student.

Although we had originally planned to assess teacher candidate attitudes as part of the pilot study, resolving issues of instrumentation took longer than expected. In the end, we sought and received permission to use a shortened version of Epstein’s (1992) survey for experienced teachers. Based on use of the shortened instrument with 15 first-year and 41 experienced K-12 teachers who worked in one elementary, one middle school, and one high school in the same district, Edwards (2003) concluded that both groups, regardless of level, held positive attitudes toward each of five types of parent involvement and toward parent involvement in general although there were significant differences between beginning and experienced teachers. We expect to extend this work to preservice teachers at various stages in their programs.

**Implications for Teacher Education**

This section reviews the strengths of the curriculum developed for preservice teacher candidates. It then examines two areas for continued development of the modules as a tool for this application: curriculum of preservice teachers. Finally, it explores the potential of the modules for use in the professional development of experienced teachers.

Modules developed by the Partnership have demonstrated impact on candidate knowledge of and skills for engaging parents. Furthermore, the modules are available online—free to anyone who chooses to use them. They utilize the model of six types of parent engagement developed by Epstein and adopted by the National PTA, and they focus on related practices of parent engagement appropriate for first-year teachers.

**Candidates learned that there is more than one solution to a problem, that cooperation with parents and colleagues expands the repertoire of the teacher, and that asking for help is often a good idea.**

Use of case studies in the modules enabled them to feature teachers who work at a variety of grade levels, teach a variety of subjects, and work in a variety of types of schools. The modules offer positive models of beginning teachers working with parents, often with the support of mentor teachers and others. Another strength of the modules is their incorporation of web-based resources including authentic resources developed by school districts, schools, teachers, and parents.

The lesson plans developed and used in the pilot test had strong features, too. By featuring cooperative learning, the lesson plans allowed candidates to learn from one another as well as from the instructor and the resources provided. Also, the lesson plans provided for teacher educators to select a case study and other material according to the prior experiences of candidates. In spite of the opportunity for instructor choice in lesson design, pilot test instructors generally selected...
all of the available case studies. Although different from the plan provided, the instructors' approach was successful in improving the assessed knowledge of the candidates. A potential strength of the lesson plans—their involvement of candidates in performing authentic tasks and assessing their performance using rubrics—was not realized when teacher educators failed to reach this phase of the lesson plans.

Integration of the six-module curriculum into the teacher education program was not realized by the approach used in the pilot test where use of the modules was sporadic, not systematic and sequential. Although complete implementation of the curriculum was not possible during the time period of the project, feedback from faculty indicated their perception of the usefulness of the modules for this purpose and the affinity of certain modules with other key content. For example, use of the Communicating module in an introductory course is paramount. Faculty easily associated the Parenting module with human development content: Learning at Home, with instructional methods; Volunteering, with planning and assessment; Decision-making and Advocacy, with equity and diversity; and Learning in the Community, with curriculum development in field settings. The pilot test did not examine the effect of cumulative use of the modules—clearly a next step in the development process.

During the implementation of the AACTE/Metropolitan Life Foundation projects, important resources for thinking with teacher candidates about the role of culture in parent involvement became available. Resources such as Culturally Responsive Parental Involvement (Goodwin & King, 2002) and Bridging Cultures Between Home and School (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001) suggest the need for teacher education curriculum in parent involvement to be supported by on-going learning about cultural and social capital and values that support cross-cultural learning. The North Texas Partnership used case studies to enable adaptation to new contexts, but we now see the need to invite parents and educators from diverse communities to become involved in continued development of this curriculum.

Another limitation in the present curriculum is its assumption of implementation in traditional campus-based settings. Strong teacher education programs embed candidate learning in partner or professional development school practice, selecting for field experiences schools that can genuinely challenge candidate growth in conceptions of equity and diversity (NCATE, 2001a; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Although the modules developed by the North Texas Partnership suggest candidates work in partner schools as a starting point for discussion, the curriculum does little to foster school-university connections. This might be overcome by development of case materials that depict candidates working in partner schools or suggestions for use of locally developed case materials.

The passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) pushes consideration of how the North Texas Partnership curriculum could be adapted for use with experienced school professionals. NCLB requires each school to develop parent involvement policies that assure accountability for student achievement, two-way communication, and literacy and technology training. This emphasis reflects the finding that the kinds of parent involvement that are directly linked to student learning have the greatest effect on achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2001). These findings suggest that first priority for professional development use of the North Texas modules should go to Communicating, Learning at Home, and Parenting. Without a base of parent involvement in these areas, attention to Volunteering, Advocacy and Decision-making, and Learning in the Community has little impact. Although our lessons for pre-service teachers have potential for conversion to workshop formats for use with experienced teachers, schools might be better served by case materials developed by teams of local educators and parents. Also, given the just-in-time and asynchronous use potential of web-based material, development of the modules as an independent learning tool for teachers is needed.

In summary, the work of the North Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement has produced a promising curriculum tool that can be disseminated online for use
in initial teacher education programs. The modular framework offers flexibility for adaptation to different settings, disciplines, and cultural contexts. The current curriculum depends for delivery on teacher education faculty who modify its elements to complement locally developed curriculum. For use in school-based professional development, the modules need to be restructured for easy modification by local delivery teams and for delivery to independent teacher learners.

References


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