ENGAGING YOUNG READERS

Promoting Achievement and Motivation

Edited by

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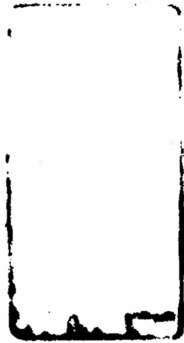

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Fostering Home and Community Connections to Support Children's Reading

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There is now a large body of evidence showing that parental involvement in children's schooling has an important influence on children's attitudes and achievement (e.g., Cairney, 1997; Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Parental involvement during the preschool years helps the child develop a foundation for the teacher to build upon when the child enters school and continues to be important even afterward (Adams, 1990; Baker, 1999). Parental involvement can be beneficial for at least three reasons:

1. Parental involvement may increase the frequency of children's literacy and literacy-related experiences.
2. Parental involvement may convey a message to the *child* about the importance of school.
3. Parental involvement may convey a message to the *teacher* that this parent cares about his/her child's schooling.

Unfortunately, too often what teachers want and expect of parents may be inconsistent either with what parents think is expected of them *or* with what they have to offer. The mismatch in expectations is most likely to occur when teachers and families come from different backgrounds. It is

the child who typically bears the brunt of a mismatch between the home and the school by not doing well in school.

The goal of this chapter is to suggest some ways that teachers can facilitate effective parental involvement in children's education and can utilize community resources to benefit children. The chapter is organized into sections corresponding to five guiding principles, each of which serves as the heading of the relevant section. The first section discusses the importance of establishing a partnership between parents and teachers. The second section provides a brief review of parental practices that contribute to children's reading development. Although most of the data in this section focus on the role of the home, some data about the importance of congruence between home and school are presented as well. The third section focuses on the importance of understanding parental beliefs about children's learning and development in order to understand differences in parents' practices. In the fourth section, we discuss factors that can lead to parents' involvement in their children's schooling, including specific suggestions that teachers can implement to facilitate such involvement. The fifth section presents community resources that a teacher can draw upon to augment opportunities available at home.

THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE HOME–SCHOOL CONNECTIONS SHOULD BE A PARTNERSHIP BASED ON RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

Many theorists and practitioners believe that a child's success in school is facilitated when there is a partnership between the child's home and school (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Connors & Epstein, 1995; Swap, 1993). In fact, establishing partnerships between schools, homes and communities is mandated by current federal policy and legislation such as Goals 2000 and Title I (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997) and is the keystone for several nationally recognized intervention programs. For example, Epstein et al. (1997) discussed six types of involvement to increase communication and to improve working relationships between home, school, and community: (1) *parenting*—helping all families establish home environments supportive of students' learning; (2) *communicating*—designing effective means of school-to-home and home-to-school communication; (3) *volunteering*—recruiting and organizing parental help and support; (4) *learning at home*—providing information and ideas to families to increase knowledge about ways to help with homework and to increase knowledge of the curriculum; (5) *decision making*—including parents in school decisions; and (6) *collaborating with the community*—identifying and integrating community resources into the school

curriculum. Similar approaches attempting to foster alliances between home, school, and community have been developed by Slavin in his Success for All program (see Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993) and by James Comer in his School Development Program (see Comer & Haynes, 1991).

The cornerstone of any successful relationship between home and school needs to be a shared understanding and agreement about the respective roles of each. Without such an understanding, the home–school relationship will be less than optimal. MacLeod (1996) discussed two reasons why teachers' attempts to get parents more involved in their children's education may not work. First, teachers often assume a background or ability that parents do not have. Second, teachers assume that parents need to accommodate to the school without the school similarly accommodating to the parents' interests and needs. We consider ways that teachers can address these issues in some of the subsequent sections.

THE HOME PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN FOSTERING CHILDREN'S LITERACY ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Children growing up in industrialized societies have many opportunities before starting school to interact with print and engage in activities relevant to literacy development (Baker, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Sonnenschein, Brody, & Munsterman, 1996). Although storybook reading is the prototypical activity, other everyday experiences also can be relevant for learning to read. The many forms of printed materials that children see in their environment even before they enter school (e.g., shopping lists, television guides) can help foster an awareness of the purpose of print. The songs children sing can foster a sensitivity to the sounds of one's language, which is an aspect of phonological awareness. Listening to people tell stories about their lives can increase narrative skills. Going on outings and watching television stories can increase one's knowledge of the world. Print awareness, phonological awareness, narrative skills, and world knowledge are all considered relevant for reading development (Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995).

Growing up in a home rich in literacy-relevant opportunities not only influences literacy development but also has a long-lasting impact on a child's desire to learn (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1998). Gottfried et al. (1998) asked parents of 8-year-olds to complete a set of questionnaires focusing on the type and amount of cognitive stimulation available at home. Most of the families were European American, but they varied in socioeconomic status (SES). Children's intrinsic motivations for reading and mathematics were assessed when they were 9, 10, and 13 years old. Regardless of the family's SES, growing up in a cognitively stimulating environment positively influenced the children's motivation at each age.

Although all children in industrialized societies have exposure to literacy-relevant materials, there are differences in the nature and frequency of experiences as a function of SES. Before the average middle-income child starts elementary school, he/she has spent hundreds of hours at home reading with family members (Adams, 1990). Such reading interactions help children develop a foundation of relevant early literacy knowledge (e.g., knowledge about print, phonological awareness) upon which teachers can build. Equally important, these early home experiences help foster a positive attitude toward reading (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994).

What appear to be normative experiences for most middle-income children are not necessarily so for low-income children. Heath (1983) has suggested that children from low-income backgrounds engage in different types of reading interactions and oral conversations with their families than do middle-income children. For example, in low-income families there often is less parent–child storybook reading and less discussion about books that are read. Even when parents discuss books with their children, such discussions are less likely to go beyond the immediate text and therefore these children are less likely to acquire skills thought to be relevant for later reading development (Snow, 1991).

In addition to differences in the amount and nature of book reading experiences, mother–child conversational patterns may vary across low-income and middle-income families. For example, Snow (1983) suggested that middle-income mothers are more likely than low-income mothers to require their children to make remarks contingent upon prior ones. Such discourse prepares children for the type of explicit language commonly used in text.

Until recently many schools seem to have operated under the assumption that all children arrive at school with middle-income experiences and knowledge (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Due to the nature of their home experiences prior to entering school, children from low-income families often do not display the knowledge expected by their teachers and have difficulty succeeding in school. The differences evident when children start school increase as they proceed through school (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988).

Once middle-income children enter elementary school, their parents continue to be involved in their education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996). These parents, especially mothers, are particularly involved when their children are in elementary school; they monitor homework, read with their children, and are generally supportive of the schools. When middle-income parents have concerns about how their children are doing, they

initiate contact with teachers. Teachers expect this form of support and interaction. When it does not occur, teachers may erroneously assume that parents do not care or are not involved in their children's education.

Lareau (1996) described differences between middle- and low-income families in parents' involvement in their children's schooling. Middle-income parents were more likely to initiate interactions with their children's teachers than were low-income parents. Low-income parents, in contrast, even when they had concerns about their child's success in school, did not initiate interactions with the teachers. Teachers' assumptions about parental involvement may influence teachers' expectations for children's success in school, which in turn influences how teachers interact with the students (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991).

Although what goes on at home and what goes on at school both contribute to children's reading development, there has been little research explicitly relating the two. Snow et al. (1991) considered how the relation between the home and the school can affect growth in children's reading comprehension. They interviewed and observed parents and teachers of around 30 low-income elementary school children. Children's classrooms were rated over a 2-year period for instructional quality, emotional climate, and literacy environment. Homes were rated for parental literacy, availability of literacy experiences for the child, organization, and emotional stability. Ratings in each category were summed for a home and a school composite. Each child's home and class were categorized, based on the composite ratings, as high or low. If a child's class were rated as high one year but low the next, the final rating for school was mixed. Children were classified based on whether they showed 2 years of growth in reading comprehension. The sample size was low, so the findings should be viewed as only suggestive. Nevertheless, they illustrate the importance of considering the relation between home and school factors. A home with a high rating could compensate for 1 year but not 2 years of low-rated school experiences. Two years of high-rated schooling could compensate for a low-rated home, but 1 year of high and 1 year of low school experiences could not.

TEACHERS NEED TO LEARN ABOUT THE STRENGTHS, NEEDS, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES OF EACH STUDENT'S FAMILY IN ORDER TO DESIGN MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS AND MAXIMIZE PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT

Although it is reasonable to assume that all parents want their children to learn and do well in school, it is not reasonable to assume that there is a shared understanding of how to accomplish the goal of success in school.

A teacher needs to understand the child's cultural and linguistic background and, more specifically, the beliefs and practices of each child's family. As McCarthey (1997) concluded after noting that establishing home–school connections was easier with students from middle-income backgrounds than with students from nonmainstream backgrounds, "An interest in making home–school connections is not enough—it is imperative for teachers to understand the complexity of students' lives, especially of those students whose backgrounds are different from their own" (p. 176).

Teachers should consider: the language or languages spoken at home, the educational background of the family, the family's beliefs about how children should be taught and their role in the child's education, and the parents' availability to assist with homework. Information about families can be obtained through questionnaires, interviews, or conversations. Although getting the information may add hours to what already is a long day for teachers, the extra time spent should prove beneficial for the students and thus for the teachers as well.

There are several examples in the literature of what happens when there is not consensus between teacher and parents on how children should be taught. Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992) discovered that parents of low-income Hispanic kindergartners, when sent Spanish storybooks to read with their children, did not discuss the story, a frequently occurring practice in middle-income families that is thought to foster understanding of narrative text. Instead, the low-income families discussed aspects of the printed words (naming letters, sounding out words) in a manner comparable to what they did when children brought home workbooks.

Delpit (1986) described her experience as a new teacher in an inner-city school as an illustration of how a mismatch in what parents think their children need to learn and what the teacher comes prepared to teach can impact on children. She began by utilizing practices that emphasized the use of authentic literature as a tool for instruction. Her approach was consistent with recommendations from theorists and researchers. However, Delpit's African American students did not progress and their parents were critical of her approach. The parents wanted Delpit to use a more traditional approach that emphasized fundamental skills. When Delpit changed her approach to a more traditional one, the children progressed. Whether children improved due to greater congruence between Delpit's practices and parents' ideas or due to her providing instruction more tailored to the children's needs or both cannot be determined.

There is growing awareness that parents' practices may be influenced by their beliefs, which in turn may be influenced by their cultural background (Sonnenschein et al., 1996). Teachers need to understand parents'

beliefs about their children's development in order to design effective instructional programs. As Goldenberg et al. (1992) suggested, "Parent involvement efforts in the area of early literacy might be more effective . . . when [teachers] build on parents' understandings and beliefs about how children learn to become literate" (p. 53).

The need for teachers to understand parental beliefs is particularly important when families do not share the same cultural background as the teacher. Valdes (1996), in an ethnographic study of school children growing up in a Mexican American community, showed that the many differences in beliefs about how children should behave in school or how parents should interact with teachers resulted in these children having a less than optimal educational experience. Consider the beginning-of-the-year "Open House," an annual tradition in most schools in this country. It is a time when parents can meet their children's teachers and learn something about the school program. Valdes (1996) noted that most of the families in her study did not introduce themselves to their children's teachers during their visit and did not view this as an opportunity to get an idea about the nature of the school program.

Three types of parental beliefs may be particularly important for children's reading: ideas about the importance of education, notions of how children learn, and expectations for parental involvement in schooling. Almost all parents stress the importance of education (Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, & Schmidt, in press). However, there appear to be differences in how parents from different social groups socialize their young children for school (Baker, 1999; Baker et al., 1995).

The results of a 5-year longitudinal investigation with children from Baltimore, Maryland, called the Early Childhood Project showed that differences in parental beliefs influenced children's literacy acquisition in late preschool and the first few years of elementary school. Low-income parents of children starting elementary school were more likely to view reading as fostered through an emphasis on skills, stressing the use of flashcards and workbooks. Middle-income families were more likely to attempt to engage the child by making interactions enjoyable and allowing the child to choose and initiate activities. The latter approach, one which emphasized engagement, facilitated the development of early literacy competencies, which in turn influenced later reading development.

Stipek, Milburn, Clements, and Daniels (1992) had similar findings. They interviewed parents of preschoolers about the appropriate way to teach basic academic skills to young children. Low-income parents in contrast to middle-income ones were more likely to stress a didactic approach.

After learning about the children's families, teachers should look for opportunities where parents or other family members can engage in relevant activities consistent with their own beliefs about what is important.

There are many areas that are relevant for reading development, including knowledge of the world, phonological analysis, and comprehension. It is also important to engage the child. Teachers should look for situations where there is an intersection between activities parents may value and those important for development. For example, Pelligrini, Perlmutter, Galda, and Brody (1990) found that low-income mothers of preschoolers were more likely to elicit their children's participation when reading expository rather than narrative text. Although we traditionally think of parents reading storybooks with their young children, teachers should encourage the reading of any type of text if there is the potential for engaging the child (see Dreher, Chapter 4, this volume). If parents attempt to elicit their child's participation, the child will probably become more interested in the reading interaction.

In addition to suggesting activities congruent with parents' beliefs, teachers can use their knowledge of a child's family to suggest activities not currently being implemented. Teachers can encourage parents to make children aware of the print in their environments. For example, parents can look with their children at advertisements in newspaper circulars. Children can be encouraged to cut out words from certain categories (food, etc.) and bring these to school to make a word tree that can serve as the basis for a conceptual learning unit (e.g., items sold at stores).

Learning about the backgrounds of one's students should enable teachers to make lessons congruent with the experiences of these students. McCarthey (1997) conducted an ethnographic study of nine children (aged 8–10 years) attending a public school in the Southwest. These children's teachers provided many opportunities for students to read novels, to reflect upon what they had read, and to attempt to draw connections between what they were reading in school and what they were doing at home. Nevertheless, despite the teachers' attempts to connect the world of the home and the school for their students, the program was more suited to students from mainstream backgrounds. Students from low-income *or* minority backgrounds had much more difficulty relating what they were doing at home (which in reality was very different from what was done at school) to what they were doing at school. Consequently the school lessons were less meaningful for them. McCarthey (1997) concluded:

> Selecting books that were not relevant to many students' lives and inadvertently excluding some students from classroom discussions seemed to be rooted in teachers having more information about middle-class students than students from working class or culturally diverse backgrounds. The teachers' practices were rooted in their (erroneous) assumptions that just providing literacy opportunities . . . would result in students' automatically making home–school connections. . . ." (p. 176)

Instead, teachers need to learn what is going on in their students' lives to better tailor instruction.

URGING PARENTS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IS NOT ENOUGH; TEACHERS OFTEN MUST PROVIDE PARENTS WITH THE TOOLS ENABLING THEM TO DO SO

Although parental involvement may be beneficial for students, not all parents become involved, at least to the degree that some teachers would hope. Better-educated parents are more likely to be actively involved in their children's education than are less-educated parents (MacLeod, 1996). It is the children of this latter group who are more frequently counted among children having difficulty in school.

In the previous section, we reviewed research showing the importance of learning about parents' practices and, especially, their beliefs about how children learn. We included some discussion of how such knowledge could inform teachers' programs and interactions with children and their families. In this section we focus on increasing parents' involvement at home and at school. The section begins by considering factors that influence parents' involvement in their children's schooling and concludes by presenting suggestions for what teachers can do to involve families.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) reviewed research suggesting that a parent's decision to be involved in his/her child's education is based primarily on three factors: the parent's beliefs about the parental role, the parent's sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school, and the general push for involvement from the school. There appear to be differences due to sociocultural background in how parents view their role in their child's schooling. For example, although Asian American families push their children to excel in school, this is reflected in their home interactions rather than their presence in their children's schools (Dornbush & Glasgow, 1996). The lack of parental appearance in the classroom may be less of an issue when the child is doing well. It becomes more of an issue when the child is having difficulties. In such cases the parent is viewed as not caring, and the teacher may give the child less attention (Snow et al., 1991).

There is a positive relation between parents' beliefs that they can help their children succeed in school and parents' involvement in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Obviously parental self-efficacy is related to parental education. Even parents who have limited education, however, feel able to assist their young children during the

first few years of school. Dauber and Epstein (1993) reported that around 75% of their sample of inner-city parents felt able to assist their elementary school children with reading. On the other hand, parents may have competing demands upon their time that limit their availability to assist their children. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that inner-city parents who worked outside the home were less likely to assist in school, but working status did not deter many of these parents from assisting their children at home. However, working parents reported spending less time helping their children with homework than did nonworking parents.

We also need to consider parents' self-efficacy in conjunction with their ideas about what factors can cause a child to be successful in school and their notions of intelligence (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, if a parent believes a child's school success is due solely to nonmalleable ability, the parent will be less likely to assist his/her child than would a parent who believes school success is due to effort.

A third influence on parental involvement is the parents' perception that their involvement is desired and welcome. Parents tend to be more involved when teachers actively encourage involvement; such pushes for parental involvement are also correlated with children's academic success (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, for a review of research). Merely requesting or welcoming parents' involvement may not be sufficient, however. Teachers should offer suggestions for how parents can assist their children. In fact, one of the best predictors of parental involvement is parents' perceptions that teachers offered them guidelines (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). It is important to realize that parents who feel unsure of themselves may need more encouragement to become involved as well as instruction in how to do so. Unfortunately, in the Dauber and Epstein study (1993), only a third of the elementary school parents reported receiving guidance for checking their children's homework.

Parents' perception that they do not receive guidance about how to help children with homework is one shared by teachers. Eccles and Harold (1996) asked teachers of elementary students to note the frequency with which they made certain types of requests from parents or offered them certain types of guidance. Teachers viewed themselves as frequently (several times a month) encouraging parents to become involved in classroom activities or to monitor their children's work at home. However, only rarely did they offer suggestions for what parents could do to help their children with schoolwork.

Even when parents perceive that their assistance is welcome, requests from teachers may come at nonoptimal times. Dauber and Epstein (1993) examined parental involvement practices and what schools are requesting of them in eight inner-city schools in Baltimore. Parents reported that they had the most time to assist on weekends, a time when most young chil-

dren are unlikely to be given homework. If teachers truly want parents to be involved with their children's homework, they should give assignments at times when parents are the most available to help.

Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) also have considered the factors that predict parents' involvement in children's schooling. They discussed three types of involvement: *behavioral*—participating in school activities and/or helping with homework; *cognitive-intellectual*—exposing one's child to intellectually stimulating activities; *personal*—knowing what is going on with the child at school. Different factors or combinations of factors, including self-efficacy of the parent, social support, socioeconomic status of the family, attitude of the teacher, and parental beliefs, predicted each of the three types of involvement. For example, mothers who saw themselves as teachers and who felt able to assist their children were more receptive to teachers' attempts to involve them than were other mothers. Teachers' attempts to involve mothers who were experiencing stress or who had values or attitudes different from the teacher were less receptive to becoming involved.

The remainder of this section addresses what teachers can do to foster parents' participation at home and at school. As teachers attempt to get parents more involved in their children's education, it is important not to become discouraged. Several attempts may be necessary before a parent becomes involved. What works with one parent may not work with another.

Communicating with Families

A key element in getting parents involved in children's educational programs is for teachers to establish a means of communication by soliciting parents' input and being responsive to their concerns (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski & Fredericks, 1989). Pryor and Church (1995) distinguished between giving parents information relevant to all the children in a class and giving parents information tailored to the specific needs of an individual child. Both types of information are necessary. At the start of the year, teachers should convey to parents, either orally or in writing, what they would like to see in terms of parental assistance with homework. Newsletters or other such communications should be sent frequently from teachers to parents indicating what is occurring in class and informing them of upcoming events.

Additional communication should be tailored to the profile of the individual family. For example, Betty Shockley and Barbara Michalove, teachers in a school in a low-income community in Georgia, used journals to dialogue with parents about what their children were doing in the classroom (see Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995). Children brought the journals back and forth each day between home and school. Parents wrote their reactions to what children were reading at home or concerns they might have; the teacher responded and made additional comments. When later in the year parents reflected upon the year, most families noted how useful and rewarding they had found the journals.

A similar technique was used by Lazar and Weisberg (1996) with the parents of children attending a summer reading clinic. These authors reported that comments in parents' journals were particularly helpful as a source of topics to incorporate into the classroom instructional program.

Although requiring daily journal entries and daily responses by teachers might prove too taxing, teachers could ask parents to keep a weekly journal in which they expressed their concerns or satisfactions with what their child was doing. Teachers could use these journals as a means of offering individualized suggestions for how parents could assist their children. Teachers could also use the knowledge they gain about a child from these journals to structure classroom experiences. Parents whose literacy levels are too low to keep a written journal could be encouraged to tape their thoughts. As part of the ongoing dialogue between teachers and parents, teachers should indicate either how they are modifying the child's program in response to parent-noted concerns or why the concerns may not be consistent with the teacher's opinion.

Fostering Parents' Involvement at Home

Parents will be more likely to become involved if they have the time and believe they have the ability to help their child. Many teachers like parents to assist their children with homework. In planning children's homework assignments, teachers should think about the complexity of people's lives. Assignments, if possible, should be planned for times when parents are available to help. A fairly common and important assignment is having children read at home with a family member. The success of such an assignment depends upon the child having a book, having someone who can listen to the him/her read, and especially having someone whose literacy skills are sufficient to engage the child. All three can be problem areas for certain families.

Many researchers have implemented programs where books from a classroom library are sent home with children (e.g., Come & Fredericks, 1995; Morrow & Young, 1997). Some have even sent home audiocassettes and tape recorders (Koskinen et al., 1995). The results in terms of children's engagement and development were very positive. Interested teachers could create a class-based lending library and send books or stories home with their students. Sending home magazines or books that children have

read in class is often useful when the children's parents' literacy levels are low because the children can assist with the reading.

Although having books available is a necessary first step when reading with a child, many parents need additional suggestions about ways to make the interactions engaging and beneficial for the child. In fact, Hannon (1987) found that just sending books home to parents did not increase children's subsequent scores on reading measures relative to a control group. In contrast, Morrow and Young (1997) found that a parent intervention program that provided parents with information about activities that parents could do with their children was more effective in boosting children's reading scores (both their achievement and motivation) than just a school-based intervention.

The discussion that occurs around text is important. By discussing the text, parents can ensure that their children have understood it and can model strategies for comprehension. Parents should ask children questions that encourage them to go beyond the literal meaning of the text. Thus, they should ask children to consider why certain actions took place, to predict events, and so on (see Whitehurst et al., 1994, for additional information).

A common reading experience for many young children is storybook reading. However, narrative is but one genre. Parents should be encouraged to read different genres as well with their children (see Dreher, Chapter 4, this volume). It is important to realize that reading a novel to a child and reading an expository text require the use of different strategies to facilitate comprehension on the part of the child. Warren and Fitzgerald (1997) developed an effective technique for showing parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds ways to read such expository text with their children that resulted in the children being able to understand unfamiliar text when they later independently read it. The critical element in the intervention was that parents taught their children steps for identifying main ideas and supporting details. When parents merely read to their children and asked them to recall as much as they could, understanding was not facilitated.

Teachers interested in providing parents with guidelines for reading with children might invite parents to a workshop where strategies for discussing both narrative and expository text are presented. They could offer parents copies of a videotape demonstrating these strategies to take home with them. Key points could be copied onto a chart distributed to parents as well.

Teachers also should encourage parents to have children read to younger siblings. Fox and Wright (1997) found that having children read age-appropriate stories to their younger siblings was an effective means of fostering fluency and comprehension. It also helped boost the children's self-esteem.

Although reading with children is important, it is not the only activity relevant to facilitating literacy development (Baker, 1999). Some parents have a limited awareness of the array of experiences that foster literacy development. For example, some might overemphasize the use of flashcards or workbooks (Baker, 1999; Sonnenschein et al., 1999). Although developing skills is important, skills may be better acquired in a setting that is more fun and fosters engagement (Sonnenschein et al., 1999).

Providing families with information about activities that foster literacy development is often useful. Thus, parents need to know that listening to and telling stories about events in their lives can foster narrative skills. Playing word games can increase children's phonological awareness. World knowledge is also important for reading development. Judicious selection of television programs by an adult can help increase a child's knowledge about the world as well as facilitate narrative comprehension, especially if the adult watches with the child and discusses the programs with him/her. Although television shows that have a purposeful educational focus obviously are relevant, even shows that emphasize entertainment often contain useful information. When children are young, mundane activities such as trips to the supermarket can be learning tools. Teachers might also want to include in their newsletter to parents a calendar of upcoming local events of interest, especially free ones, that children and their families could attend.

Fostering Parents' Involvement at School

In addition to encouraging involvement at home, parents should be encouraged to be involved at school. Such involvement can increase their awareness of what is done at school and their support for school programs. Seeing parents involved at school may reinforce for children the notion that school is important and increase their motivation for learning.

Parents need to feel welcome at the school. As much as possible, special events should be scheduled at times convenient for most families. The availability of child care is a necessity for certain families.

Parents should be encouraged to serve as volunteers at the school. Volunteering might be based on a parent's area of expertise. The work of Moll and Greenberg (1990) in Mexican American communities in Arizona is one example of utilizing parents' expertise; the authors used families' "funds of knowledge" to serve as the basis for the curriculum. Teachers visited families of their students to learn about these families' activities and social networks. The goal was to develop instructional modules incorporating family resources and knowledge.

Using families's funds of knowledge can have positive consequences for both children and their families. It can increase children's

the world, which is important for comprehension. Seeing one's parents playing a role in what is taught at school also can affect children's motivation to learn. Incorporating family knowledge into classroom activities can increase the parents' motivation by helping the parents (who otherwise might feel marginalized due to differences in background, language, or education) realize that their experiences are relevant.

Publicizing contributions by family members is a nice way of thanking participants and encouraging others to participate. Thus, mention can be made in a newsletter or a section of a classroom bulletin board of who has recently volunteered in the class or assisted with an activity.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS MAKE USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES TO AUGMENT WHAT IS AVAILABLE AT HOME

Teachers can draw upon a broad array of community resources. Although the specifics of what is available will vary depending upon both the community in which a school is located and the teacher's ingenuity, community resources can be grouped into three broad categories: programs designed to improve adults' literacy skills; mentors or volunteers; and sources of supplies, services, and programs.

Adult or Family Literacy Programs

Some parents do not become involved in their child's education because their own literacy levels are low. However, many communities have adult literacy programs designed to improve parents' reading abilities. Research has shown that adults completing such programs read more to their children, who in turn show improved language and literacy skills (Neuman, 1995; Neuman, Caperelli, & Kee, 1998). The programs vary: some are federally sponsored (e.g., Even Start) whereas others are locally sponsored. Teachers can get information about some family literacy programs from the Internet (e.g., www.ed.gov/Family/Brochures.html; also www.ed.gov/FPIE). Additional descriptions of several such programs are available in a book by Morrow (1995). These are some of the characteristics of successful programs: they provide literacy instruction to any and all members of the family, use a broad-based variety of recruitment plans, emphasize participant involvement in planning and development of the program, use creative scheduling, offer transportation and child care, use experienced teaching staff, have ongoing monitoring of program quality, and have staff who are knowledgeable about the community and resources (Neuman et al., 1998).

Mentors or Volunteers

Teachers can draw on the services of other community members to substitute for unavailable parents. For example, many schools use local senior citizens as volunteers in the classroom. Other schools have started partnerships with community groups (e.g., the Boy Scouts) or businesses (the local post office, newspapers). The nature of these partnerships can vary. In some cases, the partners commit time to helping in the classroom. In other cases, partners serve as role models or mentors to students.

Although volunteers can be effective supplements to a teacher's program, volunteers need training to be effective. Teachers should not assume that any literate adult can just step in and tutor a young child. Wasik (1998) reviewed the characteristics of 17 volunteer tutoring programs. Successful programs, that is, programs where children's reading improved, shared certain common characteristics. They provided sufficient training for the tutors prior to beginning tutoring and monitored progress once tutoring started. Successful tutoring programs included similar core components—reading new material, rereading familiar text, writing activities, activities focusing on word analysis. Successful programs also ensured that the child was an active participant in each session. Thus, if teachers want to make volunteer tutors part of their reading program, they need to provide sufficient training to their tutors prior to commencing the program and to monitor the progress of the children during the program, making changes in instruction as necessary. Training for tutors should include information about what learning to read entails as well as instruction in how to actively involve the child.

Sources of Supplies, Services, or Programs

Teachers also can use community agencies or organizations to give children experiences that they otherwise might not have. Such experiences provide information about the world, which in turn is related to academic achievement. Organizations can serve as the site of a field trip, an instructional module, or an afterschool or summer program. For example, many museums and zoos offer programs that might well be employed as learning tools by schools.

The public library is an important but often underutilized resource, especially by lower-income children (see Baker, 1999, for a discussion). Yet libraries can provide these children access to books and other activities. Ramos and Krashen (1998) described how taking a class of inner-city Hispanic students to a local library and allowing them to take home some books increased their self-reported frequency of reading. These children's self-reports were confirmed by independent reports given by their parents

Teachers can ask businesses and groups in the community to donate needed supplies. For example, stores and businesses in the neighborhood might have a book drop where customers could bring in children's books they no longer wanted. These books could then form the basis of an in-class library or a class-based lending library (see Chambliss & McKillop, Chapter 5, this volume).

Churches or religious organizations often provide or support family literacy services. Teachers can contact leaders of such organizations to request support for their efforts. For example, ministers can discuss with parents the importance of participating in family literacy programs and becoming more involved in children's education. In addition, ministers might be able to encourage congregants to volunteer in the schools.

The Internet also can serve as a resource to teachers. A recent search indicated many sites pertinent for teachers. There were three that seemed particularly pertinent. The web page for the U.S. Department of Education (http://www.ed.gov/) has links to listings of government-published pamphlets for parents (www.ed.gov/pubs/parents.html) and links to a site listing ways to foster family and community involvement (Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, www.ed.gov/Family/Brochures.html). The Web page for the Partnership for Family Involvement (http://www.ed.gov/PFIE) provides information about current developments in education with an emphasis on ways to foster involvement from families and other groups. The Web page for Read Write Now (http://www.udel.edu/ETL/RWN/) provides a listing of reading and writing activities for children from birth through sixth grade that parents can encourage at home.

CONCLUSIONS

Home and community connections are critical to children's reading development. Both the home and the school play important roles in fostering children's literacy engagement and development. A parent's influence on a child's literacy development starts before the child enters school and continues throughout the school years. Once a child enters school, effective teachers help facilitate the establishment of a partnership between home and school, one based on mutual respect and understanding.

Although all parents want their children to succeed in school, there are individual and sociocultural differences in parents' involvement in their children's schooling. It is often not sufficient just to urge parents to become involved in their child's education; teachers must provide parents with the tools to enable effective involvement. Such tools can only be developed after teachers learn about each student's family—their strengths, needs, beliefs, and practices. By understanding a child's family situation, teachers can improve communication with the family; they can devise instructional programs that capitalize upon the strengths of the family; they can offer suggestions to compensate for weaknesses within the family.

Effective teachers also make use of community resources. Community members and organizations can augment what is available at home, provide role models, and be a source of supplies and information.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Baker, L. (1999). Opportunities at home and in the community that foster reading engagement. In J. T. Guthrie & D. E. Alvermann (Eds.), *Engaged reading: Processes, practices and policy implications* (pp. 105–133). New York: Teachers College Press.

This chapter provides general information about reading development and, more specifically, home influences on reading development.

Epstein, J. L., Coates, L., Salinas, K. C., Sanders, M. G., & Simon, B. S. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

This book is particularly helpful in addressing ways to involve community members in school programs. It contains many handouts for teachers to use.

Fredericks, A. D., & Rasinski, T. V. (1990). Involving the uninvolved: How to. *The Reading Teacher, 43*, 424–425.

The article contains many helpful suggestions for ways to involve family members in their children's schooling.

Shockley, B., Michalove, B., & Allen, J. B. (1995). *Engaging families: Connecting home and school literacy communities*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

The authors include a detailed description of the journal exchange used as a means of communication between parents and teachers.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Achieving Expertise in Teaching Reading

PATRICIA A. ALEXANDER
HELENROSE FIVES

As the second graders arrive for another day of school, Moira Redcliff greets each with a warm smile and a few words that convey her interest and concern for her students: "Hi, Emma. Is your grandmother still visiting?" "Boy, I like that sweater, Jackson." "Morris, did you bring that permission slip for the field trip?"

This same kind of interest and concern is evident in the way Moira has approached her first year of teaching at Milam Elementary School. Moira began this first year armed with the latest theories and techniques she learned in her elementary education program and with a real desire to make a difference in students' lives. But her desires and expectations have not been realized in the way she hoped. Moira spent many a long night designing her lessons and preparing instructional materials, proof of which can be seen in a quick glance around the room. There are several colorful bulletin boards or learning areas, for instance, and samples of the children's work hang everywhere. But there are visual clues that things are not operating to perfection in Room 240. Books that are apparently part of the reading corner are pretty scant in number and in poor condition. Some are strewn on the floor. There is also a behavior management chart prominently displayed on the front board, and it is filled with names and strings of check marks. What appear to be the remnants of an unfinished project on Native Americans sit on the window ledge, along with piles of unmarked papers and