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Facilitating Parent Involvement: Reflecting on Effective Teacher Education

Alyssa Gonzalez DeHass

One of the most frequently voiced barriers to more parental involvement in the schools is the lack of teacher training in promoting home-school involvement. Teacher education in parent involvement must capture teachers' attention and instill them with an appreciation for the benefits of parent involvement. Once educators see the value and are sincerely receptive to parent involvement, instruction can be geared towards an understanding of a range of parent involvement types and strategies. Of particular need is helping teachers to become competent and confident in encouraging parent involvement during the adolescent years and among minority families. This article presents suggestions for how teacher preparation programs and inservice staff development workshops might most effectively convey this information and thereby adequately prepare teachers to build healthy family-school connections.

Although the importance of family involvement is widely recognized in education, its implementation in actual practice is weaker (Shores, 1998). Despite federal mandates for an increase in family involvement programs in education, development of such programs has not kept pace with the demand. School efforts to involve parents vary greatly (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). While schools invite parents to attend school meetings and conferences, most do not invite them to participate in extended and engaging activities (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). The traditional parent-teacher conference has been the focus of most parent involvement efforts (Shores, 1998). The lowest rates of parent involvement are often among minority families (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999; Eccles & Harold,

1993; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Moles, 1996; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Thorp, 1997), low-income families (Desimone, 1999; Geenen et al., 2001; Karther & Lowden, 1997; Lewis & Henderson, 1997; Marcon, 1999; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), and during the adolescent years (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Moles, 1996). A decline of parental support is evident in high schools around the nation, with more than 70% of urban school leaders recently citing the scarceness of active parental involvement as a major dilemma in their schools (Ziegler, 2000).

One of the most frequently voiced barriers to more parental involvement in the schools is the lack of teacher training in promoting home-school involvement (Baker, 2000; Decker, Decker, Boo, Gregg, & Erickson, 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997; Shores, 1998; Tichenor, 1997; Weiss & Correa, 1996). A recent study examining teacher preparation programs across the nation identified that less than half of the states' programs included a parent involvement component (Weiss, 1996). Subsequently, it is no wonder that schools and teachers often lack the knowledge of how to effectively involve parents in the schools and rely on very limited/traditional types of parent involvement. This deficit is born from a lack of preparation of preservice teachers and is perpetuated with lack of professional development through in-staff training.

Teacher preparation programs provide a systematic foundation of diverse pedagogical tools. However, "preservice education is only a foundation" (Weiss, 1996, p. 9). Few would argue that teacher education stops after the teacher preparation program. Inservice staff development is a necessity for ongoing professional development. Both avenues for teacher development are essential and will naturally play a part to some degree. The purpose of this manuscript is to suggest critical content that needs to be conveyed given the research in parent involvement as well as to discuss the most effective instructional methods in communicating this information to both preservice and inservice educators.

Critical Content for Teacher Education

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Unfortunately, there is an attitude within some schools that reflects a lack of valuing parental participation or parental opinions in the schools (Baker, 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Ramirez, 1999; Shartrand et al., 1997). Some educators view parents as problems that are best kept at a safe distance from the genuine work of the schools and as people who often have to be appeased when angry (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). Consequently, parents often feel unwelcome on school premises, feel like intruders rather than partners, and when they contact teachers with questions the initial reaction is that they are interfering.

However, benefits of parent involvement continue to be documented. During the elementary school years, parent involvement has been positively related to academic achievement, student sense of well-being, student attendance, student attitude, homework readiness, grades, and educational aspirations (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). In fact, parent involvement is an important factor in a student's educational success all the way to the high school level (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hart, 1988; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parental involvement has been positively related to high school students' academic achievement (Paulson, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Trusty, 1996), time spent on homework (Keith, Reimer, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986; Trusty, 1996), favorable attitudes toward school (Trusty, 1996), less likelihood of high school dropout (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990), and academic motivation (Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002; Steinberg et al., 1992). Parents play a particularly critical role in special education. Parents must be involved in eligibility decisions and IEP development for their own children, and they also are key stakeholders in advocating for appropriate education for special needs students (Voltz, 1998).

If teachers see the benefits, they are more likely to truly value parent involvement. With this appreciation for parent involvement, they are more likely to make sincere attempts to establish connections with parents. Further, when teachers are versed in the benefits, they

will be able to communicate these benefits to encourage uninvolved parents. Because, while many parents seek out opportunities to be involved, there are parents who believe that running schools should be left up to educational professionals (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Because some parents have no history of being involved and see no reason to begin doing so, there has to be a discussion, among parents and teachers, as to the importance of each party's role (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992).

Diverse Strategies for Parent Involvement

Once educators see the value and are sincerely receptive to parent involvement, instruction can be geared towards a range of parent involvement types and strategies. This would help to offset a typical pitfall of teachers when attempting to encourage parent involvement; teachers tend to focus on a limited range of parent involvement strategies. Often teachers focus on the parent-teacher conference to the exclusion of other types of involvement that would include more parents. The Harvard Family Research Project found that among 58 teacher education programs nationwide, parent-teacher conference was by far the most frequently addressed strategy for family involvement, encouraging parents to teach children at home ranked second, and recruiting parents as classroom volunteers ranked third (Shartrand, Kreider, & Erickson-Warfield, 1994).

Different theorists cite different typologies; see Bausch (1994) for a detailed review. Synthesizing across these typologies, one gets an appreciation for the range of parent involvement activities available to parents in order to account for diverse schedules and parents' comfort level. Epstein's (1995) model is frequently cited and presents six types of involvement: parenting, home-school communication, volunteering, engaging in learning activities with children at home, schoolwide decision-making, and community participation. A great deal of research has resulted in a plethora of detailed parent involvement strategies that teacher educators can use to support their parent involvement discussions (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Moles, 1996; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Sanders, 1996; Shartrand et al., 1997; Thorp, 1997). Specific suggestions that represent such a range of activities are interwoven throughout the remainder of this article.

Parent Involvement in Adolescent Years

Parents of elementary school children have opportunities to be involved in homeroom parties, PTA meetings, and assisting teachers in the classroom by performing such tasks as supervising, teaching special skills, or providing clerical help (Eccles & Harold, 1993). However, once a child reaches the secondary level, such parent involvement opportunities may not be present or may no longer be appropriate with secondary curricula.

We need to share with teachers alternative ways parents may be involved with their older, adolescent children (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Moles, 1996). Eccles and Harold (1993) argue teachers often interpret students' increasing need for autonomy as a sign students do not require or wish their parents to be involved in their educational experiences. However, adolescents' need for independence should not be interpreted as a call to end parental involvement. Adolescents can be better assisted when both parents and teachers work to support them (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Adolescents have much to gain from the exposure to many different adult models as they try to form their own identities. Once students leave elementary school and enter adolescence, parents begin to assume the role of advisor and confidant (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992). Parents have the unique opportunity to serve in an advisory role for those students at risk of academic and personal failures (Moles, 1996). Having a supportive adult may be particularly crucial during transitions from elementary grades into adolescent school years (Sanders, 1996). A parent resource center would provide a viable meeting place for those interested in becoming mentors and tutors.

Additional factors to be considered include the nature of the schooling and the complexity of the curriculum. The intricacy of the secondary-level curriculum, the high level of academics required, and the added extracurricular choices also make it difficult for parents uncertain about their abilities to get involved as well as for the teachers to connect with students and their families (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). According to Dwyer and Hecht (1992), some parents feel that because they have not mastered the academic concepts their children are studying, they lose confidence in their ability to help. However, schools can make materials available through a parent resource center for those

interested in workshops in specific curricula areas (Moles, 1996). Other options might include a website that would direct parents to helpful resources on a variety of curricula issues.

Parent resource centers can also provide a meeting space for parents and an area available for parent education workshops. There is a diversity of critical issues pertinent to the adolescent period. For instance, parents would be interested in learning more about academic tutoring possibilities, college programs, community resources, and various health issues that are emphasized at these ages: smoking, drugs, alcohol, gang activity, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Moles, 1996). Parents are responsive to becoming more informed on challenges their adolescent child might have to face. This way parents can be confident in their ability to support the adolescent concerning situations they might not have had to confront during their own youth. Also, school-community partnerships would allow community members to meet with educators to discuss societal challenges facing adolescents as well as to identify helpful resources available in the local community. Materials pertaining to curricular choices, college programs, and financial aid would allow parents to still be involved in curricular choices and career exploration.

Because of the class size and the number of classes a teacher is responsible for at the secondary level, teachers have limited access to students and, consequently, their parents. Meanwhile, because students have a different teacher for each class, parents are unsure as to whom to contact when they have questions (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992). "Teaming teachers" has been suggested to allow a particular student's teachers to coordinate and communicate with parents. One team member can act as a contact person for both the student and the student's parents.

Cultural Diversity in Family Dynamics

Many individuals have cited the importance of increasing understanding of family dynamics content given the diverse nature of today's families (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Lewis & Henderson, 1997; Lopez et al., 2001; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Scales, 1994; Thorp, 1997). Often teachers (especially those new to the field) are unfamiliar with

the demographic groups they are teaching. Diversity is often seen as a problem rather than an opportunity (Thorp, 1997). Cultural differences can lead to parents and teachers disagreeing on the role parents should play in their child's education (Geenen et al., 2001; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Shartrand et al., 1997; Thorp, 1997; Voltz, 1998), particularly among families of immigrant status (Decker et al., 2000) or migrant status (Lopez et al., 2001).

Research cites traditional parent involvement activities as focusing on parent participation in organized activities at school or giving parents "specific guidelines, materials, and/or training to carry out school-like activities in the home" (Lopez et al., 2001, p. 256). These limited parent involvement activities ignore cultural perspectives of minority populations. In particular, Lopez et al. conclude that this is an ineffective avenue for enlisting parent involvement in migrant-impacted schools. While schools tend to see parent involvement defined in terms of parental participation of organized activities at the school, parents see their involvement in more informal activities that can take place outside the school such as providing nurturance, talking with their children, instilling cultural values, and checking homework.

For example, the parent-teacher conference is dictated by the school and held on school turf, which can be intimidating for parents of low-income or minority children (Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Thorp, 1997). Dornbusch and Ritter (1998) found 80% of high school teachers in their study agree that many parents are uncomfortable or feel out of place at school; this is especially true of minority parents. Alternative ways of communication between parents and teachers are not offered, and parents have little say (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Geenen et al. (2001) found many differences on roles parents seek out in being involved. African-Americans, Native-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans were more likely to focus on the important role they play supporting their child at home. While European-Americans placed an emphasis on meetings at school, minority parents placed more emphasis on teaching children about cultural values and preparing them for life after school. This research uncovered the possibility that the historically low rates of involvement assigned to parents that are culturally and linguistically diverse may be explained by the narrow focus on parent involvement at the school.

Different cultural groups might also look at some educational issues differently: appropriate behavior management strategies, appropriate classroom behavior, extrinsic motivators, and student autonomy (Thorp, 1997). Parents may defer educational judgments to the “expert” educational personnel (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000), and this should not be seen as a lack of interest in their child’s education. Cultural discrepancies that exist between the home life of minority and less educated parents and their children’s school life may create tensions and intimidation between the parents and the teacher, discouraging such parents from taking part in their children’s school environment (Baker et al., 1999; Eccles & Harold, 1993). Voltz (1998) has suggested we may need to reconceptualize parental involvement in order to include diverse cultural perspectives by examining salient cultural features and identifying barriers to developing more effective relationships with culturally diverse families.

Matters are only made worse in that few reform efforts have made serious attempts to include families from low-income backgrounds (Lewis & Henderson, 1997). Parents of low socioeconomic status, in particular, face barriers when attempting to become involved in the schools their children attend. According to a study by Baker et al. (1999), these parents have fewer opportunities to meet and share information with the teachers; attend events at school due to lack of transportation, money, or child care; and make their presence known to the school staff. Efforts also need to be taken to include parents with limited English skills (Moles, 1996; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000). Having translators available for family-school meetings, translating materials sent home, hiring secretarial staff members who can speak the language of the community, and offering parent literacy programs send a clear message to parents that their input is welcomed.

Ideally, parents who represent the cultures of the community are the ones we truly want to draw into parent liaison experiences. They often have a better chance of connecting with other parents of diverse backgrounds in light of the initial mistrust that sometimes exists between minority parents and school officials (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Thorp, 1997). These parents are untapped resources for aiding in the strengthening of multicultural education classrooms and schoolwide initiatives. All groups have much to offer in sharing their

culture through assistance with arts and crafts, music activities, and culinary delights (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Thorp, 1997). However, classrooms will be inviting to all cultural groups if they truly integrate the community's cultural diversity and avoid a "tourist perspective" (Thorp, 1997). Decorations and learning materials should reflect the diversity of the students who are part of the classroom and community, and the images of different cultural groups should present individuals as they dress in the United States and not solely in the attire of their cultural heritage. However, appreciation for cultural diversity should not be relegated exclusively to a "multicultural appreciation week"; diversity should be incorporated into the classroom experience as much as the students themselves.

Teachers need to be apprised of the cultural disparities in parent involvement that exist so that they are prepared to interact with and involve parents in culturally sensitive ways. However, we need to move beyond simply providing descriptions of different cultural groups to engendering an appreciation for intragroup differences (Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Thorp, 1997). Teachers should reflect on their own cultural values and beliefs and then examine the role culture has in their own lives (Thorp, 1997). Walking the line dividing cultural sensitivity and stereotyping can be a slippery slope. Sometimes the best strategy is to display openness and interest in learning about what makes cultural groups different from one's own cultural identity while still expecting individual differences within groups.

Effective Communication Techniques

Another area for teacher development is in effective communication techniques (Tichenor, 1997; Weiss, 1996). There are occasions, such as conferences or placement meetings, where communication between home and school has the potential to become a volatile situation. Techniques in active listening and assertive communication would be advantageous in these situations. Teacher preparation in problem-solving and communication skills will also help to build teachers' confidence in successfully interacting with parents outside of the conference setting.

Family-school involvement brings together diverse individuals and can sometimes result in conflicting personalities and conflicting attitudes; this would be an unfortunate state of affairs when all parties have a vested interest in improving the learning experience of their children (Sanders, 1996). Ideally, we seek to draw people together from different backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences. Teacher education must provide a foundation of effective communication skills to encourage a thoughtful interchange respective of each stakeholder's position and background. Sound communication strategies afford the chance to understand the needs of all stakeholders that otherwise would likely not be addressed and would embitter the family-school partnership. Given the chance to role-play or engage in discussion of case studies allows preservice teachers to both evaluate classroom challenges and dialogue solutions to remedy the problem (Shartrand et al., 1997; Weiss, 1996).

Effective communication becomes particularly critical when dealing with families of diverse cultural backgrounds (Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew, 1999). Parette and Petch-Hogan (2000) offer helpful guidelines teachers can reflect on to stay sensitive to diverse cultures: educators should be knowledgeable of family dynamics, understand who the key decision-makers are when they schedule "parent-teacher" conferences, be sensitive to a culture's rules regarding body language and nonverbal communication, establish a community liaison when possible, and remain genuine and open to the family members' concerns for their child. Being able to reframe and to see issues from another's perspective are vital to productive collaboration (Thorp, 1997).

Available Support Services

Teacher knowledge of family support services in the community will also strengthen the link between home and school (Weiss, 1996). Often teachers focus on the benefits parent involvement has for the child and school. It is not as common for them to reflect on the benefits to the parent. Ironically, this might be the only way to reach some parents. There is a range of support services available to families: health and dental screening; family welfare services; mental health services; substance abuse treatment; and basic services pertaining to housing, food, clothing, and medical insurance. Educators may not

have the knowledge of these services if they themselves have not had to seek out such support. However, tapping into fulfilling parent and family needs may be one very effective avenue into later school participation on other levels. Alternatively, parents who become involved in education may also become aware of the opportunities and resources available for their own education credentials and learning (Sanders, 1996). "Effective teacher functioning requires that the community and its total resources, both human and material, be known and used effectively" (Fitch, 1979, p. 82). Fitch (1979) suggests a course in social foundations covering issues pertaining to special interests in the school's community, welfare services, and other community agencies.

A professional working within the school can play an emphasized role in relationships with families (Moles, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Weiss & Correa, 1996). A report published by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement provides detailed coverage on creating "family-friendly" schools to enhance community involvement and identifies the role a parent liaison can play (Moles, 1996). The liaison might be a member from the community who is hired on a full or part-time basis. The report validates the use of Title I Funds for such recruitment, as it is a legitimate use under the Improving America's Schools Act. However, if funding cannot be garnered, perhaps parent volunteers already displaying an interest in being involved might be recruited for the role of the liaison. Being a member of the community, the parent liaison would be particularly equipped to communicate with the "hard-to-reach" parent. Liaisons might promote parent involvement on many levels: discussing learning activities parents can engage in with children at home, conducting surveys of parent needs and interests, coordinating parent education workshops, and welcoming parent visits to school. Parent resource rooms can offer the opportunity to welcome parents of different groups into the school, and they provide a space for parents to talk with each other and feel confident coming to a school where others in their communities are participating (Thorp, 1997). Educators should be made aware of the different resources or liaisons in the schools that play a central role in efforts to connect with families.

Public School Law

Another literature area that would be beneficial for teachers to grasp is a basic understanding of the legal rights of both teachers and students (Garner, 2000; Lane, 1979). There are many unfortunate instances in the classroom that can result in court proceedings, and as evidence to this the number of lawsuits is on the rise (Garner, 2000). Garner (2000) lists many such potential situations: discipline scenarios involving due process and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, first amendment violations of free speech in regards to student dress and expression, unreasonable search and seizure of students' personal property, academic rights under the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, and civil rights violations for discrimination. Issues such as child protection laws, equal opportunity in education, and civil rights would be instrumental topics in teacher education.

Teachers would benefit from an understanding of their legal obligations surrounding suspected child abuse and student discipline cases. Teachers would be more informed as to the rights and responsibilities of the different stakeholders, and therefore they would make more informed decisions. Being forearmed with this knowledge is critical given that "ignorance of the law is not an accepted excuse" (Garner, 2000, p. 2). Having this base of knowledge will also bolster teachers' confidence in decision-making as well as effectively communicating with parents. Current teachers are aware of this need and have identified it as an essential area for teacher preparation (Davis & Williams, 1992, as cited in Garner, 2000). Unfortunately, it seems that knowledge of school law receives little attention in most teacher preparation programs (Garner, 2000).

Instructional Methodology

Preservice Teacher Preparation

Many have addressed the need for a re-examination of teacher preparation programs to incorporate more preparation in encouraging family involvement (Fitch, 1979; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Lane, 1979; Scales, 1994; Shartrand et al., 1997). "Elementary and secondary schools struggling to restructure are handicapped with the arrival each

year of an estimated 120,000 new teachers who come from teacher education programs that operate aloof from growing public demands for reform” (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 16). Whether this instruction is carried out through a separate course or infused throughout other teacher education courses there are certain key elements that should be considered.

One important component for preservice teachers would be exposure to “master” teachers. Educators should be exposed to “master teachers” who have extensive experience in parent involvement activity. These mentors can share benefits they have witnessed when parents are involved, effective strategies they employ, and how they handle some of the challenges that can occur when attempting to build parent involvement. This might be a more effective way to motivate educators to pursue their learning on parent involvement rather than relying exclusively on reading scientific research results (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). In addition, this would give students the opportunity to discuss with educators how they overcame the obstacles of parent involvement in their own schools. The result is likely to be a vicarious boost in students’ efficacy to face the realities of parent involvement in their own classrooms.

Ideally, we should encourage field experiences whereby teachers can have the opportunity to witness family involvement in practice (Shartrand et al., 1997). Field experiences would allow for teachers to actually observe master teachers’ strategies in practice. These experiences enhance preservice teachers’ communication skills and understanding of diverse family backgrounds. Given that most teacher preparation programs contain some degree of field experience to their program, it would not be difficult to incorporate observations with a parent involvement component. If a stand-alone course is established and incorporating a field component turns out to be difficult, a case study approach might be used in its place. Given the chance to engage in discussion of case studies allows students to both analyze why the problem is occurring and propose solutions to remedy the problem (Shartrand et al., 1997). Students’ problem-solving skills can be enhanced from opportunities to evaluate hypothetical classroom situations and listen to classmates’ divergent perspectives.

Preservice teachers might also benefit from discussions with parents and other key stakeholders in education (Fitch, 1979; Lane, 1979; Shartrand et al., 1997; Tichenor, 1997), and this can be as simple as inviting parents to come and speak with preservice teachers. Parents who serve as a parent liaison or are members of School Improvement Teams and Parent Teacher Organizations would be ideal guest speakers who are easily accessible through teacher preparation programs' ties to school districts. Other possible speakers could be practicing teachers and even former program graduates. This would allow for the opportunity to understand the parental perspective on the matter of parent-school interaction. Students interested in teaching in the local community would gain an initial understanding as to parental expectations, school district demographics, and community resources (Fitch, 1979).

Alternatively, it has been suggested that working with parents might be incorporated into students' internship experiences (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Student teachers have reported feeling prepared to utilize parent involvement strategies based on experiences working with parents: observing parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA meetings, and planning events and field trips (Tichenor, 1997). One very poignant observation stems from the need to provide preparation in family involvement initiatives across the public school grades (Shartrand et al., 1997). Logically speaking, it should come as no surprise that we should see a decrease in family-school involvement as we move into the secondary school grades given there is less coverage of family involvement issues in preparation programs for those interested in teaching adolescents.

Inservice Staff Development

Another traditional avenue for teacher education concerns inservice staff development (Moles, 1996; Shartrand et al., 1997). Ongoing professional development allows educators to engage in a practice of reflection. Instruction can be geared toward discussion surrounding the problems teachers confront daily in the classroom. However, it is important to consider the structure of these staff workshops. One study in particular speaks to the effective use of professional development activities (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman,

& Yoon, 2001). While Garet et al. speaks to professional activities across domains, we can apply their suggestions to staff development in parent involvement.

We should seek to infuse inservice activities within the teachers' regular workday and help teachers see how content ties into actual practice. We need to tie parent involvement instruction to teachers' needs in the classroom. We need to help teachers see that parent involvement initiatives can aid in their goals for academic achievement, student attendance, and homework completion. In addition, we should convey that when parents are involved, they have more positive attitudes towards the schools and act as resources for teachers both in and outside of the classroom.

Development activities should also be of sustained duration (Borko, 1997; Garet et al., 2001). This allows teachers to be able to apply their learning into their classrooms while still coming back to gain feedback on their attempts. Longer activities are also more likely to allow for comprehensive connections to teachers' instructional needs and standards. We need to engage teachers in active and hands-on learning about parent involvement. Professional development activity should allow for participants to engage in thoughtful discussion and exchange and examine resources or materials that are relevant to their particular teaching concerns. Through more "hands-on" activity, teachers are more likely to grasp and derive meaning from professional development activities.

Ideally, we should also seek activities that allow for collaboration of teachers within the same school and provide opportunities for them to serve as resources to each other. These experiences can take diverse forms, including providing feedback on a teacher's home-school communications, having teachers review each other's parent involvement materials and resources, and inviting peers to observe a teacher's interaction with parents during school functions.

Addressing teachers' preconceptions about parent involvement is a vital element for staff development (Borko, 1997). Helping teachers to examine and reflect on their own beliefs about parents' involvement may serve to challenge any preconceived notions they may have that will be detrimental to encouraging parent involvement. If teachers

engage in discussions of these obstacles and how they are minimizing parent involvement, more conscious efforts to overcome them can be undertaken.

Conclusion

Parent involvement is a worthy endeavor and has a sound research base, as evidence of the many potential benefits it can offer in education. Unfortunately, it is for the most part unrealized in many schools, and rates of parent involvement in the secondary years and among students of diverse backgrounds are of particular concern. More systematic and meaningful parent involvement is hindered by many obstacles, not the least of which is lack of teacher preparation. This article surely is just a part of what should be an ongoing discussion of practical suggestions for more effective teacher education in parent involvement. The outcome of such discussion will be teachers who are prepared to confront the realities of the many obstacles to parent involvement in the schools. Until we make steps to address the role and nature of teacher education in parent involvement initiatives, we will not reap the rewards parent involvement can truly offer.

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