

with the culture of U.S. classrooms; and (3) to create a context in which mainstream teachers could broaden their views of the language and literacy knowledge of immigrant parents. As in Ada's project, the parents who participated in Krol-Sinclair's investigation had fewer than 6 years of formal schooling and were not proficient readers in either Spanish or English. To prepare for their classroom storybook reading event, they attended a training session as a group 1 day each week. During this session, they were introduced to effective storybook reading strategies, chose a book they wished to read, and rehearsed it with a partner. When they entered the classroom on a subsequent day to read to the children, they were introduced by the classroom teacher, who often participated by observing the session and, occasionally, by offering comments during the read-aloud.

Audiotapes of classroom and home storybook readings and interviews with the parents and with the classroom teachers revealed several positive outcomes. Parents used the storybook reading strategies they had been taught in the classroom at home in their family storybook reading times. In addition, parents became familiar with what Corno (1989) called "classroom literacy" (p. 29)—that is, they were able to articulate classroom routines, how children interact with text at school, and how children learn to read. Also, parents found the experience affirming and viewed their classroom storybook reading as evidence that they had something to offer to their children's school. The teachers who participated reported increased awareness of the commitment that parents have to reading with children and helping children develop their literacy. Krol-Sinclair noted, however, that "none of the teachers reported that having parents read to the students in their classrooms was important for their own understanding of the ways parents and children engage in literacy" (p. 281); further, no teachers "reflected on how they could build on the experience in attempting to link literacy at home and at school" (p. 281).

Madrigal, Cubillas, Yaden, Tam, and Brassell (1999) implemented a book loan program as part of a larger effort to provide multiple learning opportunities for Spanish-speaking preschool-age children. Underlying their work was an assumption that parents were interested in and capable of reading to and with their children, but that financial, time, and transportation constraints limited their access to books. Madrigal et al. sought to minimize such constraints by establishing a lending library (with a large selection of books in Spanish) within the

walkway directly across from the children's preschool classrooms, thus providing access to the books for both parents and children when entering or leaving the classroom. A member of the preschool staff assisted parents with checking out books. Data confirmed the researchers' assumptions regarding parent interest: 70% of eligible children and their parents participated in the book loan program and two parent receptions/reading demonstrations were attended by 100 parents. Six of the eight most popular books were Spanish titles, underscoring the importance of first-language and culturally relevant materials.

The work of Shockley, Michalove, and Allen (1995) stands out from other studies described in this section in that these teacher-researchers did not set out to work with children who were predicted to experience or who were already experiencing difficulty in school. Rather, as first- and second-grade teachers and researchers, they sought to bring parents, teachers, and children together to support every child's opportunities to learn. At the heart of their work with parents was a respectful dialogue, which began the first day of school when Betty Shockley, a first-grade teacher, sent an invitation to parents to "tell me about your child" (p. 8). This first contact began a year-long dialogue that included home reading journals, in which, 3 nights a week, parents and children recorded their responses to their shared homework assignment: to read, talk, and write about a book of the child's choosing. Home-school dialogue continued through family stories, which children were invited to share each day during storytelling time and parents also were invited to write for inclusion in a class book. The dialogue concluded with a learning album assembled at the end of the year. It included a set of parallel questions about the child's literacy learning answered separately by parent and child. The learning album was sent on to the second-grade teacher for her to read and learn from. Finally, seven meetings were held throughout the school year, identified as adult literacy conversations. These were intended to help teachers understand what parents believed was important about literacy and schooling. Shockley et al. emphasized the reciprocal purpose in their approach:

In developing our partnerships with families, we were not trying to impose our vision of literacy but to develop relationships with families where we could learn about what already existed in the families and connect that with the literacy classroom community. We were trying to learn from parents what literacy events were important in their lives

and share with them the important literacy events in their children's school. (p. 94)

Anecdotally, parents praised the efforts of these teachers to bring home and school together, noting that the reading journals gave them a way to judge their children's progress and that the teachers' personal responses to them helped to maintain their children's interest in school and to develop a genuine and meaningful relationship with the teacher. In reflecting on their work, Shockley et al. concluded,

Programs are implemented; partnerships are developed. Programs are adopted; partnerships are constructed. Parent involvement programs as America's schools have implemented them have serious problems. By their very nature, most programs have steps, elements, or procedures that become static. A program cannot constantly reinvent itself, change each year, be different in every classroom, and for every teacher-family-child relationship. Yet schools and parents have a shared and vested interest in children that almost demands some kind of collaboration. We believe...that this shared responsibility should be a genuine partnership. (p. 91)

A key element in each of the programs described is the reciprocity between parents and teachers. Although each program emphasizes uncovering the richness already present in the families of the children we teach, each also emphasizes teaching the skills and conveying the knowledge children need to succeed in U.S. schools. As Lisa Delpit (1995) forcefully reminds us,

Students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge. (p. 45)

Conclusion

How do we make promising practices such as those cited more commonplace in our schools so that we may effectively bring parents and teachers together to help every child achieve school success? In each case, the practices described take time from the lives of busy teachers and busy parents; in some cases, they take funding for special activities or events;

in all cases, they require careful thought and reflection, perhaps a good deal of background reading, and certainly, opportunities to engage with others in conversation and response. Although all the practices would likely be most beneficial if implemented by a community of learners, a single teacher and a single parent could do any effectively alone. More than a decade ago, Joyce Epstein (1986) concluded an article on parent involvement with a restatement of several facts that emerged from the study, and perhaps the most important among them was the following:

Parents' education did not explain their experiences with parent involvement unless teacher practices were taken into account. In the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in the use of parent involvement, parents of all educational levels said they were frequently involved in learning activities at home. (p. 291)

This fact brings us once again to what is, perhaps, the most commonly reached conclusion in education: When all is said and done, the teacher makes the difference. Knowing this to be true, let us do all that we can to improve on the old ways and continue to explore new ways to bring home and school literacies together so that all children can gain access to the abundance of riches in our society.

Questions for Discussion

1. Interview a principal and two or three teachers from the same school about their home-school partnership initiatives. Are there practices and procedures in place that are likely to lead to the reciprocal learning that characterizes effective partnerships? Which of the practices are likely to help teachers learn about the family and their literacy practices and routines? Which of the practices are likely to help parents learn about the skills and strategies that they might use to help children succeed in school?
2. Interview three or four parents of children from one classroom about their perceptions of their roles in their children's school learning and about the ways they help their children in school. Are their perceptions and actions consistent with what their children's teacher expects of them? Are the home-school initiatives that are in place sufficiently helpful to parents in meeting the teacher's expectations?

3. Conduct one or two home visits for the purpose of finding out what the families know, what they do, and how they do it. Consider what you learn in light of the classroom literacy curriculum and related instruction. How might you use the information collected during the home visit to influence what you teach and how you teach it?
4. If you were to conduct an evaluation of programs designed to help parents support their children's literacy learning, what criteria would you use to frame the evaluation?

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