SINGAPORE

REVIEW

Vol 9 No. 1 Feb 2000 MITA (P) No 039/01/2000

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The ASCD (Singapore) Review is published three times a year in March, July and November. The views expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect the official position of ASCD (Singapore).

Published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Singapore).

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Printed by Eurasia Press Pte Ltd

Working with Parents & the Community

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Teacher-Parent Partnership: Educating the Whole Child

Esther Tan

The Importance of Teacher-Parent Partnership

The home is the nurturing ground for all children, their parents being their first teachers and role models Everything that a child learns at home – the language that he hears, the attitudes that he observes and the values that are transmitted by his parents – he will bring to school. Parents have such an influence in their child's learning in school and yet, as an educational resource, they are probably the most neglected item of teacher support. The influence they have on their children is often overlooked or, in some cases, crudely cited as a factor in explaining poor performance (Bell & Best, 1986).

There is a great deal of evidence in the literature that parent's attributions, beliefs and values affect greatly their children's self-esteem and school performance. Home-school link established through teacher-parent interactions is an important dimension of a child's schooling. The active, involved and concerned parent can function as a member of the "teaching" team, providing support and enriching experiences for the child. If the parent understands and endorses the educational goals and teaching methods of the school, he will be able to reinforce at home what the child has learned in school. If the teacher has a good knowledge of his pupils in the light of their home background and upbringing, he will be able to appreciate their individual differences and cater to their differing learning needs in school. If teachers and parents are to work together to enhance the education of children, they need to have similar goals and a shared vision.

If the teacher has a good knowledge of his pupils in the light of their home background and upbringing, he will be able to appreciate their individual differences and cater to their differing learning needs in school.

The Evolution of the Singapore Education System

The Singapore education system has undergone several reform movements since the country gained independence in 1965. In the early years of nation-building in the 1960s and the 1970s, the education system was "survival-driven" so the focus was on the quantitative supply of education. Much time and effort was spent on providing mass education, building social cohesion and

developing a national identity. With growing affluence amongst the citizens, the Singapore education system entered a new phase of development in the 1980s, characterised by efforts to rectify deficiencies and to fine-tune the system. So streaming was introduced to reduce educational wastage and values education was emphasised to promote social cohesion. Also a school appraisal system was established to bring about greater efficiency in school management. This was the era of the "efficiency-driven education" when educational policies focussed on identifying what the nation wanted to achieve and seeking the best way to achieve the goals with optimal use of resources. The current educational initiative introduced by the Ministry of Education is to move towards an ability-driven education system which aims at educating the whole child. The ultimate goal is to develop the full spectrum of talents and abilities in every child, both academic and non-academic, and to equip pupils with the necessary skills and values so that they can contribute to society in what they can do best. To realise the noble goals of the "ability-driven" education requires a change in mindset for both teacher and parents and a new type of teacher-parent partnership in education.

The current educational initiative introduced by the Ministry of Education is to move towards an ability-driven education system which aims at educating the whole child.

Re-defining School Success

For a long time, success in school has been determined in terms of excellence in academic performance. How well a child has done in school is often measured by his test scores and examination results. It is no wonder that traditionally, the teacher-parent partnership in most Singapore schools has been geared towards helping to raise the children's academic performance in school. Remedial classes on weekends and during the school holidays for the weaker students are a common feature in schools. For most school going children, receiving tuition at home before or after school has become part and parcel of their formal education. A national survey on the Singapore family revealed that in raising children , the greatest worry mentioned most often by parents is problems with their children's education, especially in terms of achieving academic excellence. Examples of the problems parents see concerning their children's education are that their children "need to study more" or "need tuition". (Quah, 1999). All these need to change if current educational reforms introduced by the government are to be taken seriously.

In the "ability-driven" education, the term "success in school" takes on a new meaning. The basic belief is that every child has some talent or ability as well as the potential to succeed and

excel in his own sphere. The nature of this unique quality may vary from child to child and both the parent and the teacher have an important role to play in the identification and development of individual talents and abilities. Since these talents and abilities could be academic or non-academic, success in schools means more than scoring in tests and excelling in examinations. This also means that the traditional indicators of "school success" are no longer valid. Excellence in academic pursuits is an indicator of "success" only for children who are academically inclined. If the educational goal is to educate the whole child, then more appropriate indicators of school success should be the following: –

a) the child's school experience is an enjoyable, enriching and meaningful
b) the child's school experience enables him to discover his interest and abilities
c) the child's school experience provides him with ample opportunities to develop his talents, build up his strengths and enhance his self-esteem
d) the child's school experience has adequately prepared him in knowledge skills and attitude and values to appreciate life and contribute to society.

The Meaning of "Educating the Whole Child"

Howard Gardner (1997) suggested that there are at least eight types of intelligence manifested in eight kinds of abilities:

. . . the traditional indicators of "school success" are no longer valid. Excellence in academic pursuits is an indicator of "success" only for children who are academically inclined.

Linguistic – the ability to read, write and use language to express ideas and thoughts.

Logical – the ability to use inductive and deductive reasoning, to recognise and use abstract patterns and relationships.

Spatial – the ability to create visual representations and understand Information with mental pictures.

Musical – sensitivity to pitch, timing and rhythm of sounds, to appreciate create or learn through sound and music.

Kinesthetic – using the body to communicate ideas and emotions, solve problems and create products.

Interpersonal – the ability to understand and work effectively with others.

Intrapersonal – the ability to be aware and understand one's own feelings.

Naturalist – the ability to recognise, discriminate, sort , classify and care about plants and animals.

These abilities may show up in academic pursuits, in extracurricular activities or even during social or recreational events. Parents are in the best position to identify these abilities in their own children. Observant teachers can also spot these talents in their pupils in and out of the classroom.

It is a common knowledge that children need linguistic and logical abilities to excel in academic pursuits. But this does not mean that children who do not do well in academic subjects are doomed to fail in school and later in life. If parents and teachers are enlightened and keep an open eye, they will soon find that children who are not academically inclined are endowed in other areas such as music, art or sport.

Schools Reaching Out to Parents

Teachers and parents share the same concern and a common goal – educating the whole child. Ideally the teacher-parent partnership should be one of mutual respect, mutual support and two-way communication. As parents and teachers monitor the progress of children at home and in school, there should be a full sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise in helping these pupils develop as individuals. There may even be occasions for shared decision-making with regard to making educational plans for the children. To forge this close teacher-parent partnership, schools need to reach out to the parents in the following manner:–

Making the school an inviting place for pupils and parents

In their deliberations on "Invitational Learning", Purkey and his co-authors (1990) discuss the "Powerful Five Ps" of an inviting school, namely, place, policies, programmes, processes and the people. The authors firmly believe that a pleasant physical environment is a major way that the school demonstrates its concern for the people it seeks to serve. An inviting school is one where the pupils feel at home and the parents feel welcomed. There are no "Keep Out" signs to make them feel like intruders. Instead, parents feel a sense of belonging as they have a niche in the school, be it a cosily furnished Parents' Room where teachers and parents can meet and share in a cordial manner or something simple like a bulletin board for parents for updating and exchanging of information.

Ideally the teacher-parent partnership should be one of mutual respect, mutual support and two-way communication.

For the teacher-parent partnership to be effective, parents must be well-informed about school policies and teachers' pedagogical practices.

Establishing a channel for two-way communication with parents

To engender a feeling of partnership and mutual concern, there should be an on-going two-way communication between parents and teachers. This could be done on a regular basis through written communication such as newsletters and notes, or face-to-face interaction at orientation programmes or meet the parent sessions. With regard to pupils with special needs, parent conferencing or home visits are additional measures to reach out to the parents in a bid to help the child.

Involving Parents in Shared Decision Making

A true teacher-parent partnership should include information exchange and shared decision-making. Parents have a right to information about their child's progress in school, their strengths and weaknesses so that they can make informed decisions about their child's schooling in matters such as choice of extra curricular activities, choice of school subjects or even choice of school.

Parents Reaching Out to Schools

Rather than waiting for the school to contact them, parents should be proactive and take the initiative to reach out to the schools. Parental involvement in the school can take place in at least four areas:–

Assisting teachers

Teachers are busy people with an increasing number of demands made on their time and energy. If they have the time and are willing to help, parents can assist the teachers in tasks that do not call for professional expertise. Some examples are parents serving as "reading moms" or helping to supervise the children during educational tours or school outings.

Being informed about teachers' aims and methods

For the teacher-parent partnership to be effective, parents must be well-informed about school policies and teachers' pedagogical practices. This is possible if they are briefed and kept informed. This will enable them to follow up and reinforce at home what is being taught to the children in school.

Contributing to the school curriculum

Parents can contribute to the curriculum in many ways, sharing their interest with and demonstrating their skills to pupils. For example, parents can help to write school newsletters, select books for the library and organise social and recreational activities at school. As part of career guidance activities, parents who are professionals in the various fields can conduct career talks to enlighten the students about various kinds of careers or even organise work experience or work shadowing for the students in their own workplaces.

Participating in decision-making

Some working parents do not have the time to spend in their children's school; others may not feel comfortable in doing so. Still, all parents wish to be involved in decision-making, especially in matters concerning their children's education such as choice of secondary school and subject combination in school. Such decision-making is possible and effective only if the parents are properly and adequately informed about educational policies, school policies and their children's progress in school.

Barriers to Effective Teacher-Parent Partnership

Despite good intentions of both parties, there are barriers and limitations to an effective teacher-parent partnership. Mortimore (1993) has identified at least four barriers to effective teacher-parent partnership:–

Communication barriers, especially between teacher and parents from different cultural, social or educational backgrounds

Teachers and parents may differ not only in their values but also in their conceptions of childhood, parenthood, toys, play and schooling. Teachers may assume that if parents come into the school and see what goes on, they would appreciate its value. This is not always the case as the parents' perceptions and expectations are often coloured by their own upbringing and childhood experiences. It is therefore important for teachers to understand the thinking and beliefs of the parents, where they are coming from and why they think and behave the way they do.

Teachers and parents may differ not only in their values but also in their conceptions of childhood, parenthood, toys, play and schooling.

Lack of teacher preparation for work with adults

Teachers have a great a deal of knowledge and experience in managing their pupils in and out of the classroom. However, some may still lack the confidence and skills in dealing with parents. This is especially true with young, beginning teachers who often feel intimidated by assertive and demanding parents.

Parent-Child tensions

Sometimes conflict between the parent and the child may give rise to tension and the teacher is caught in between the two. For example the parent may act inappropriately towards the child in the presence of the teacher, making it necessary for the latter to intervene, and, in doing so, loses the neutrality of his/her position.

Fear of parental take-over

In situations where parents are actively involved with the work of the school through parent-teacher associations or volunteering, there may be an underlying fear that parents might "take-over" or exert an unreasonable degree of influence over the teachers' work. Probably most teachers could identify readily at least one parent whom they envisage as a potential menace. Such views may inhibit teachers' willingness to attempt greater involvement with parents.

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Ways of Overcoming the Barriers

Research and field studies conducted in the US have found that teacher-parent partnerships tend to decline across the grade levels unless schools and teachers make a special effort to nurture and sustain this partnership.(Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997).

If parents are to be encouraged to spend time in the school, then there is a need to clarify the legal position of the teacher and the parent volunteer; to provide guidelines for parents working in schools and to provide mechanisms for monitoring such an involvement.

Realising the importance of the home-school link, a council called COMPASS (COMmunity and PArent in Support of Schools) has been set up to advise the Ministry of Education on matters related to school-home-community partnership. This council hopes

to actively encourage parents and the community to work together with schools to help children learn better and be a forum where best practices in education partnership can be propagated and feedback from the public channelled to the relevant authorities.

The Benefits of Parent-Teacher Partnership

Teachers and parents may come from different cultural and social backgrounds but their common concern for the child and consideration and respect for each other will form a strong foundation for an effective parent-child partnership.

A carefully-implemented and well-sustained teacher-parent partnership benefits all parties concerned. When parents have a sense of belonging to the school, they become co-operative and willing to offer support. They identify with the school and make an effort to understand school policies. This helps them to appreciate the problems and constraints of the school and become partners rather than adversaries to the teachers.

On the other hand, teachers who work closely with parents will find that they can understand their pupils better. The partnership also enables them to identify pupils with special needs earlier and intervene in a more effective manner. As a result they are empowered in their teaching.

In a true teacher-parent partnership, the real winners are the children themselves. When their teachers are interested in them as individuals, nurturing all aspects of their development in the cognitive as well as affective domains, they feel special and wanted and very "at home" in the school environment. When their parents show a deep interest in their schooling, the learning process that has started in school will continue to be nurtured at home with full parental support. With their parents and teachers working together to develop their abilities and nurture their talents, these children will be empowered to develop their potentials to the fullest. In this lies the true meaning of teacher-parent partnership in educating the whole child. ■

In a true teacher-parent-partnership, the real winners are the children themselves.

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The Outram Approach: CREATE, CONNECT & COMMUNICATE

Chan Poh Meng

Creating the Culture:

A School Vision shared by ALL

1999 was the most exciting, rewarding and eventful year for all of us at Outram Secondary School. In January, the staff adopted the shared vision of "An Intelligent School, A Caring Family" based on a set of values which all teachers took a year to verify. This on-going process of verifying assumptions to constantly affirm our beliefs in what we as a school would want to be is a key ingredient of sustainable success.

The striking logo shown in **Figure 1** is designed by the school's art teacher and her former pupil. The light bulb represents Outram as a thinking school that develops the multiple intelligences of our pupils, nurturing them into individuals of integrity, strong fortitude and undaunted moral courage. The red heart represents Outram's zeal to inculcate in the school community a sense of belonging to a big, warm, caring and cohesive family where everyone is a valued member.

Rich Traditions

For visions to be powerful, they must be meaningful and relevant not only to the school but to the community at large, in short, all stakeholders. The school, established in 1906, has had a very rich tradition of actively engaging the continued involvement of the parents, alumni and the community. Currently, the three major organisations that actively support the school include the School Advisory Committee, the Old Outramians' Association and the Parent-Teacher Association.

Connecting with the Community:

Working Collaboratively with the Stakeholders

Upon the school's return to York Hill, the School Advisory Committee was responsible in renovating the Pool and Squash Complex. When the school was temporarily sited at Winstedt Road for three years for redevelopment of the new premises at York Hill, the Pool and Squash Complex, built in 1977, was left unattended to, thus the need to renovate. Without the dedication and commitment of the SAC, our pupils would not have been able to resume their swimming programmes and water sports.

Encouragement and Appeals

In collaboration with the school, the Old Outramians Association (OOA) is in the process of transforming the OOA Room into a Pupil Activity Centre, a "home away from home" for students after school hours. With the help of part-time counsellors and parent volunteers to man the centre, it was opened in January 2000.

Figure 1

Together with the OOA, the Parent-Teacher Association has been offering annual bursaries and awards to needy pupils. The two organisations also encourage parents and alumni to conduct workshops, offer counselling or volunteer to assist in educational field trips. The School Administration at various Meet-The-Parents Sessions also reiterates the importance of parental involvement and actively sought parent volunteers to assist in various programmes. A very significant point made here is that parents' services are needed here not only for their own children but more importantly, for fellow parents who could not find the time or resources to render help even to their own. The enthusiastic response so far speaks volumes about their commitment to and the genuine love for the school.

Meet the Parents Session.

The school recognises the importance of actively engaging these three organisations as partners in education. The support of the home and the community is instrumental not only in developing a child's full potential but in shaping the child's character. This pivotal role cannot be over-emphasised. Involvement is the key to success.

Communicating using technology

Working conscientiously with Industry Partners

Outram has also begun to work with industries to enhance teaching and learning. The tripartite collaboration with IBM and Ministry of Education in the IBM-Model Schools Project has paved the way for innovative and creative use of technology to enhance communications. Outram electronically connects with parents, stakeholders and the community via the IBM-Learning Village.

The Learning Village is an IBM-patented application that has been tried out in a number of schools in the US and Canada and Outram Secondary School is the first school in Asia to pilot it. Via a specially-designed Internet site designated for the school, parents can perform various functions at the click of a few buttons.

IBM – Learning Village Training for Parents.

Offering Creative and Viable Solutions

Via the Learning Village applications (http://lvillage.outramss.moe.edu.sg), parents can check the school's calendar of events, their child's timetable, test scores and other planned ac-

tivities such as remedials, enrichment courses or extra-curricular activities, etc. They can access the personal homepage of the school's teachers which may contain information from bio-data to teaching strategies to actual lesson content. They can e-mail school staff directly or even take part in selected threaded discussions involving school matters. They can view teacher's work, pupils' projects or assignments, etc, in the near future.

Parents and Child Learning Together.

Bringing in Parents for Training

Currently, a total of about 20 parents with children from various levels are involved in a pilot phase. In August 1999, they spent an evening at the school's computing laboratory enthusiastically learning how to access and use various applications. Based on their positive feedback and pleasant experiences, the school plans to mount training for the other parents by levels. The LV applications are very user-friendly to the users, teachers and the administrators. Very minimal IT skills, on the part of the teachers, are needed to maintain the applications. Parents who are very enthusiastic not only to view but use the LV applications, are strongly advised to equip their homes with personal computers and internet services. For families that may have financial difficulties to do so, the school has approached community centres to open up their computer facilities to enhance accessibility. One limitation of the Learning Village is that it does not support the use of any of the mother tongue languages. Perhaps this is one local need that IBM has to seriously consider in future. For the illiterate parents, the school will keep in touch with them using the traditional communication channel – parents' meetings.

Conclusion

Too often, when schools are overwhelmed by complex demands and daunting responsibilities, they may be tempted to view parents and the community as serious problems rather than valued stakeholders. This chasm between schools and the community is further accentuated when the community's views apparently conflict with the roles and responsibilities envisaged by teachers. A most valuable way to bridge that chasm is to work towards a culture that aims to create, connect and communicate for sustainable success. ■

Mr Chan Poh Meng *is the Principal of Outram Secondary School.*

Towards A Common Goal: A Journey Just Begun

Tan Khar Guek

*It is yet another Wednesday afternoon. Contact Time Meeting for the teachers is just over. The Principal heads for the Penthouse {**P**(ar)**enthouse**} down the corridor. In the Penthouse, six (sometimes eight) ladies sit around a wooden teak table. They are busy exchanging stories of their experiences from the activities they have just conducted for the pupils of our school. This Wednesday, Mrs Vimala Anandan is praising the pupils of P3B for being very attentive and on-task during the one-hour Keyboarding Skills lesson in the school's computer laboratory.*

"You can hear a pin drop," she said with great wonder and satisfaction. It was only last Wednesday that she had shared her experience of having to reprimand pupils from another P3 class for being too excited and taking too long to settle down to work in the computer laboratory.

Mrs Mala Latif continues with expressing her relief that the number of books in the Reading Corner is now more adequate to meet the demands of the pupils who have come to borrow books to read.

Mrs Ellia Tong breaks in excitedly that the story telling for P1s in the Mini-hall by Mrs Chris Tay has captivated the pupils. She also reports that two more parents are assisting in this area.

Soon packet lunch arrives and in between the sharing of food, there continues the sharing of experiences and reflections to improve the management of the activities under their charge. Why not add any request for supplementary resources or seek opinion on plans for activities since the Principal is here.

This hive of excitement and lively exchange every Wednesday is but a single account of the multi-faceted support the members of the Parent Support Group (PSG) render to our school.

> *"As we move into the 21st Century and strive to achieve our vision of Thinking School Learning Nation, the support of parents and the community will be all the more important to ensure that our schools are able to respond effectively to the challenges ahead."*
>
> RADM Teo Chee Hean
> Minister of Education

In the Thinking School Learning Nation – A First Wave – Strategic Review, parental involvement was identified as one of the factors that required rethinking and re-envisioning.

In our effort to transform our school to a Thinking School Learning School, the formation of a Parent Support Group (PSG) was one of the initiatives undertaken to involve other stakeholders in providing the best education for our pupils. Involving the whole school community would also

generate valuable synergy to better meet the challenges of educating our pupils for the future. Thus, we set out to explore and actively seek out the talents and expertise of our parents.

The Journey Together: The Beginning

The Principal, in partnership with the HOD (IT) who acted as the School's Liaison Officer, met eighteen parents one evening in November 1998. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of the PSG Committee comprising of ten members. The PSG adopted the acronym ASSIST (Assisting the School to Sustain Innovations for Successful Teaching and Learning). Among the guidelines drawn up was the agreement to meet monthly to plan and review the activities of the PSG – ASSIST.

In 'rethinking and re-envisioning' parental involvement, identifying programmes to be undertaken by the parents was guided by the following principles:

- Parental involvement at school will increase if the school has the foresight to recruit and deploy parent volunteers in professional rather than administrative tasks. In doing so, parents' time, talent and expertise are employed to directly impact pupil learning.
- Parents would be more motivated if the tasks undertaken are challenging, meaningful and purposeful. When parents view their contribution as knowledge-based and innovative in facilitating school improvement and pupil achievement, maintaining momentum and high morale will be more sustainable.
- Parents and teachers will collaborate to design and plan programmes and activities. Once these are approved by the school management, parents will work independently towards achieving the stated objectives. This close collaboration will lead to the establishment of dynamic relationships between parents and teachers as they problem solve together. Such strong bonds will promote as well as protect the "bridge" being built between yesterday and tomorrow as well as the "bridge" being built between school and family.
- A setting of collaboration and purposeful work will encourage a culture of visionaries, risk-takers and experimenters. This role modelling by the parents and teachers involved is a step forward in creating organisational learning in the school for teachers, parents and pupils.

With these principles in mind, the specific areas identified for the PSG ASSIST are summarised in Table 1 attached. All activities are conducted outside curriculum time.

Subject Area	Target Cohort	No. of pupils	Skills	Frequency	Duration
IT	P3	232	Touch typing	Every Wednesday	1 hour
Reading	P3	16 in groups of 4	Reading comprehension	Twice Weekly	½ hour each
Mathematics	P6 EM2	9	Solving Word Problems	Every Saturday	1 hour

The IT, Homecraft and P1 Edutainment programmes are highlighted to showcase the enthusiasm and commitment of our parents to the school's mission to teach language skills, IT literacy and to develop pupils into independent individuals, useful to themselves and others.

IT – Keyboarding Skills

Lessons are conducted for P3 pupils by three parents every Wednesday for an hour. Classes are rostered throughout the year for lessons. By the end of the year, all P3 pupils will have been trained. This will enhance our efforts to ensure that our pupils have the basic tools to harness IT for more effective learning. Certificates for completion of course are printed and awarded to pupils.

Keyboarding Skills – Look and type.

Homecraft

In the planning stage, the PSG contributed ideas and supervised the conversion of a "spare" room at the canteen to a 'Studio Apartment' housing a kitchen and bed corner. Pupils from P4 and P5 are rostered to attend a four-lesson module to learn self-management skills like simple cooking, sewing washing and housekeeping. These classes are conducted once a week, for six groups weekly. By the end of the year, all P4 and P5 pupils will have been inducted into the programme. Classes for P6 are conducted after PSLE. Eight parents and two teachers are managing this programme co-ordinated by the Subject Head, Pastoral Care. It is a highly innovative and successful programme to teach our pupils life-skills for personal effectiveness. Parents and pupils are very enthusiastic work closely shoulder to shoulder to make such delicious dishes as sushi, teriyaki, and vegetarian noodles.

Keyboarding Skills – Type, type, type!

Edutainment @ One

While the teachers are attending Contact Time meeting on Wednesday, five parents keep the P1 pupils occupied with educational programmes on CD-ROMS, videotapes as well as story telling, singing and fun quizzes. These activities support our English and Mother Tongue programme through reinforcing the language skills as well as motivating our pupils to learn through a multime-

dia approach. The parents have also learnt to supervise 280 kids for a whole hour and they have managed wonderfully.

Getting ready to celebrate!

The Journey Together: Work and Play

The PSG members have also assisted the school in the following areas on an ad hoc basis:

- Accompanying pupils on excursions so that teachers are not repeatedly rostered for duties.
- Forming the reception committee for school celebrations viz. Sports Day, Lantern Festival. They had also assisted in reception duties at the district inter-school rope skipping competition when the teachers were otherwise occupied in conducting examinations at school. This had received special mention by the chairman of the Sports Council.
- Organising a "Family Day" for P1 and P2 pupils and their families at the Singapore Zoological Gardens. It was a real treat for parents to share in their children's excitement of a first outing with the school.
- Being judges for Young Innovators Competition held as part of National Day Celebrations.
- Co-hosting our guests from our twin-school in Bangkok.

Hi! Tea.

In the true spirit of gracious living, they organised a Chinese New Year High Tea for other parents as well as a lunch for teachers to celebrate Teacher's Day. Crowning this close working collaborative partnership was a pleasure trip to Johor Bahru to celebrate Teacher's Day. This gave both parents and teachers opportunities to see each other in a different context – At Play.

The Journey Together: Benefit Quotient

In measurable terms, the PSG's service and contributions have directly benefited 84% of the pupils in the school – every pupil from P1 and P3 to P6. We believe that other pupils have also benefited from the presence of

Meeting in the Penthouse.

our parents in the school. The desired outcomes of "Putting others first" and the value of volunteerism are visibly demonstrated by these parent volunteers. Teachers now see our parents as partners-in-education rather than as 'interference' to be kept out of school. As the PSG ASSIST develops, it is our mutual hope that the construction of the bridge started would be reinforced and strengthened by a shared vision, a spirit of collaboration and mutual trust.

The Journey Together: Challenges Faced

In journeying the road less travelled, the PSG ASSIST has encountered the constraints of time schedules and physical space (as our school is a 45-year-old building). But they are most challenged by manpower constraints. Many parents have registered to help but when contacted few turn up. One of the reasons being that, as working parents they are unable to assist during school hours. Nevertheless, this core group of volunteers has doubled up and involved themselves in the many areas of assistance. They are also appealing for more help through personal contact as well as a newsletter and a web site to be launched as part of their first anniversary to celebrate service and learning.

Areas of ASSIST

Subject Area/ Programme	Objectives/Skills	Target Cohort	Frequency Duration	No. of parents involved
IT Touch Typing	Keyboarding skills to facilitate IT literacy	P3 232 pupils	Every Wednesday 4 x 1 hour session	3
Pastoral Care Homecraft	Personal effectiveness skills	P4-P6 730 pupils 20 per class	Weekly 4 lessons x 1 hour (modular)	12
Reading	Motivate reluctant readers	P3 16 pupils 4 pupils per group	Every Tuesday and Friday ½ hour per group	2
Reading Corner	Reading for pleasure and information	Open to all pupils	Every Tuesday and Friday 2 hour session	2
Edutainment @ One	Pupils are kept occupied with meaningful activities	P1 280 pupils	Every Wednesday 1 hour session	5

Conclusion

Our PSG is a group of enthusiastic, energetic, resourceful and resilient parents who work diligently to render every help to the school. Their accomplishments in the school can be attributed to the dynamic leadership within the committee, the commitment and the humility of servant leadership of each and every member, and most importantly their focus on our common goal: To create an environment where learning opportunities are maximised for every pupil. We could not ask for more. We are indeed blessed with the PSG ASSISTance. ■

Mrs Tan Khar Guek *is the Principal of River Valley Primary School.*

Collaborative Projects

Diane Goh

Introduction

The ability to communicate and work in a team is important for students as these are important skills which employers look for. Collaboration between students, whether locally or overseas, on projects improves their ability to communicate and cooperate.

Collaboration should not only be confined to collaboration amongst students but must also extend to collaboration between the school and parents. As partners in education, any assistance rendered by the parents will undoubtedly contribute greatly towards the common objective of providing students with the best education possible.

During the past two years, we have initiated several such collaborative projects. A brief outline of two of these collaborative projects is set out below.

Collaborative Project with Students Overseas

The growth of the Internet has diminished global boundaries. Information can now be easily exchanged within seconds. The Internet has revolutionized communication and education, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. With access to this vast "net" of information and easy communication at economical rates, the Internet is an exciting and effective teaching tool.

In 1998, applying the information technology available to us, we initiated several collaborative projects with overseas schools. The most significant of which was "Virtual Zoo", a collaborative project between Radin Mas Primary School and Futurekids Hawaii. The objectives for this collaborative project were: –

a. to encourage students to use computers, in particular the Internet as a research tool and a medium of communication;
b. to encourage students to carry out further research and study of curriculum topics and to arouse interest in such topics;
c. to allow students to communicate and share their knowledge with students from different countries, cultures etc. and;
d. to provide opportunities for students to think creatively, to make decisions and to foster cooperative learning.

This project required the students to research and study animals indigenous to their respective countries and regions and to construct a "Virtual Zoo" from the information gathered. In order to provide students

with "hands on" experience of the animals they researched on, we organised a field trip to Singapore Zoological Garden and Night Safari.

Apart from their general duty of gathering information, the students were given additional duties. The students were divided into 5 teams. Each team was in-charge of a specific facet of the whole project. The five teams were the "Communication Team", the "Research Team", the "Creative Team", the "Webmasters" and the "Editorial Team".

The "Communication Team" was in-charge of gathering information from pupils in Hawaii via Video Conferencing while the "Research Team" was responsible for confirming the information gathered and preparing the write-ups on animals indigenous to our region. The responsibility of the "Creative Team" was to construct the "Virtual Zoo". The "Webmasters" gathered all the materials prepared by the above mentioned three teams to create hotlinks for the "Virtual Zoo. The "Editorial Team" recorded the daily account of the work done by the various teams.

Pupils waiting for their turn with a 'Reading Mum'.

During the project, the students were required to meet periodically to report their contributions and activities in their respective teams. This allowed the students to exchange and share ideas so as to refine and improve the project.

The project was posted onto the Internet after the IT Open House 1998 which was officially opened by the Minister for Education, Rear Admiral Teo Chee Hean. We are still continuing to update and improve the "Virtual Zoo" and to participate in collaborative projects with schools overseas.

Collaboration between Radin Mas Primary and Parents

Unlike parents of primary school students in the past, most of the parents of the current primary school students in Singapore have gone through formal education. Consequently, most of them are proficient in the English language, their respective mother tongue or both. As such, these parents are able to play a significant role in the education of their children.

Parent helping a small group of weak readers.

Last year, we implemented a pilot programme "Grow With Books", a reading programme to encourage and motivate students to read books in the English language. The parent volunteers whom we call "Reading Mums and Reading Dads" played a significant role in this project. These parent volunteers attended school three times a week to listen to students read and discuss what was read.

The programme was a success as students were motivated to read. We, therefore, extended this programme to the reading of books in mother tongue and the formation of a special programme for weak readers this year. Under this special programme, each group of weak readers, comprising not more than four students, is under the charge of a parent volunteer. This would allow the parent volunteer to give sufficient attention to each weak reader.

It is important to note that without the assistance of such parent volunteers, a programme of this nature is unlikely to succeed as it is manpower intensive. Both the school and parents are grateful to the parent

Parent assisting in the School General Office.

volunteers for their sacrifices and commitment in participating in the "Grow With Books" programme.

Besides assisting us in the "Grow With Books" programme, parents also assist us in administrative work. Their assistance in manning the school library has allowed us to extend our school library opening hours.

Conclusion

We have learnt from our experiences above that collaboration in whatever form is important in providing a good education programme for our students. As resources will always be limited, collaboration allowed us to embark on many enrichment programmes which we would otherwise not been able to carry out. In a commercial context, this is similar to a joint venture, where parties pool their resources and gain from the synergy of their collaboration. ■

Diane Goh *is a teacher in Radin Mas Primary and the Level Head for English.*

Working with Parents and the Community

Chan Wan Mui

At St Nicholas, we strive to provide students with all the best possible opportunities and facilities for the acquisition of an all round education. We believe that each child is unique and talented in her own way. Hence, we aim at maximising each child's potential by taking a holistic approach in enriching school life and learning, through the involvement of parents, alumnae and the external community, to complement the efforts of our teachers.

Parental involvement has been part of St Nicholas as far back as the 1970s. Parents and Alumnae are a treasure trove of experience and expertise which we tap on to provide extra training and guidance to benefit all our students.

Parental involvement is not meant to lessen the workload of teachers. In fact, the time spent in contacting parents, planning, monitoring programmes and updating parent data-bases adds to the duties of teachers. All the extra effort is worthwhile for the beneficiaries are not only the students but everyone who is involved in the project.

Areas of parent expertise range from simple cooking to the latest in Information Technology, from the making of local delicacies like roti prata, ketupat and "tang yuan" to the designing of WEB pages and our school building.

Though the majority of our parents and old girls have their own pressing commitments, at home and in their workplace, they willingly and generously make time, to give us a hand in moulding the future of our nation – their children, our students. They help equip our students with skills and attitudes to meet the challenges of the next millennium confidently and efficiently.

Parents & Alumnae sitting in our School Committees & involved in decision making.

Most parents are usually very willing to help out. They are just waiting to be invited to contribute. Therefore we consciously strive to maintain an inviting school environment. At our very first encounter with parents, we make time to talk to them, individually or in small groups.

We invite them to school at every opportunity we have. Sometimes, we invite them over for simple get-togethers, over tea or coffee, at the times most convenient to them – before school, after school, in the morning, afternoons, evenings or even in the middle of the night. Our doors and our gates are always open to them.

We also reach out to them through circulars, newsletters, E-mail and our school web-site, informing them of the latest developments in school.

We acknowledge their role in the partnership publicly and repeatedly, in school, at school functions and in our many publications. In these ways, we give them recognition and make them feel important, even if they can help only on a short-term basis, or in a very small way. We make them feel that they belong to one big family, that the school is their second home.

We provide them with as many opportunities as possible to interact with us and to work collaboratively together in formal and informal situations. All these interactions help to develop a special bond between the staff, parents and old girls. Together we help to build and maintain a climate of mutual trust, caring and sharing.

At our Primary 1 and Secondary 1 Orientation, we make it a point to prepare separate programmes, run concurrently, for parents and pupils. We ask parents to tell us what they, as parents, and the school should do to provide the best-possible education for their children. They also let us know the areas in which they can help the school. Our school now has a data bank recording such information as well the parents' areas of expertise and the times and days they are available to give of their services.

We involve our parents and old girls in decision-making. One example of this was in the choice of site for our present school building and in the big move to our present site in Ang Mo Kio. This consultative partnership involves holding many meetings with the parents and old girls and takes up a lot more of our time and energy, but the results are very satisfying. The brainstorming provides a large pool of ideas and represents a wide spectrum of viewpoints. Therefore the final decisions made are often sound, down-to-earth and practical. Most importantly, parents and old girls are happy that they have played their part and feel more committed to helping the school.

There are many occasions when they are similarly involved consultatively. Some recent examples are :

- Project Fairs, "Synergise I and II: on Wings of Eagles", where projects, incorporating inter-disciplinary approaches and focusing on process skills, were on display. Among the projects were those from parents and old girls. They set up rooms to display their contributions, conduct talks, demonstrate their various skills and talents.
- Concerts to commemorate the "International Year of the Older Persons" at Nanyang Polytechnic on 30 May and 1 June and at Kallang Theatre on 23 and 24 July 99. There were altogether 8 500 guests, with the elderly of all races from all walks of life and from various homes, clan associations, MUIS, MENDAKI, SINDA and from all over the world as our very important special guests. Besides multi-cultural and multi-lingual items put up by both our primary and secondary students, there were items by parents, old girls and the community, namely friends of St Nicholas. Parents, old girls and the community were also consulted when we planned our invitation lists.
- At our 65th Anniversary "We are Family" Reunion Dinner in Suntec City, we had more than 5000 diners gathered together. The highlights of the dinner again involved parents, old girls and our pupils.

Mr G. Kalidas, father of Carolyn Kalidas (Pr 2 Charity), advising the pupils in the "Next Generation Flyer" Design Competition. We bagged the 1st, 2nd and 3rd awards in 1999.

Our school culture encourages the expression of views for the improvement of the school. Many parents give us feedback via the telephone or through the mail. Parents who are not as comfortable communicating their views and suggestions in these ways make their contributions in a different way. They use suggestion boxes placed in various locations in our school.

Many of our parents and old girls also serve as our ambassadors at times. They are effective in convincing new parents, and other parents and old girls, of the value of our programmes, having had first-hand experience. Their words carry a lot of weight and many new parents have come to better understand and accept our school philosophies, goals, traditions, and also the rationale behind all our programmes.

There are endless benefits in this alliance, not only for our students and staff, but also our parents and old girls. The parents and old girls support and motivate one another to play a greater role in the education of their children. They generate ideas for information and training to im-

prove the school as well as their home climate. Their relationships with their daughters also become stronger.

This partnership-in-education strengthens the bond of love, of caring & sharing, within the St Nicholas Family. It also provides the link towards extending this bond of love towards the larger community, the nation.

The bonds that are developed in school often go on into adult life. Loyalty to family will be extended to loyalty to friends and to school, and this value will be the foundation of a united community and a cohesive nation. Sometimes the friendship that they have established with teachers and other parents lasts a life time. Their circle of friends is much bigger and wider.

Our true partners in education.

Our pupils too benefit from their parents' involvement in school programmes. They develop a sense of pride from their parents' involvement and emulate the selflessness displayed by their own parents and the countless other parents who help. These children are better behaved and have greater self confidence too.

Their education is more complete and more well-rounded and balanced. They see more clearly the importance and benefits of working as a team and will not hesitate to do their part too when their turns come in the years ahead. They will have a stronger sense of belonging, to their families, to their schools, and, ultimately, to our nation.

Parental involvement in St Nicholas is now not just a family affair – it has become a community affair. A number of well-wishers from the community at large have come forward and volunteered to help in our various school functions and activities. They tell us that they feel welcome and enjoy the sense of belonging to a big, warm and friendly family.

Parents, alumnae and the community make powerful partners in education. Together with teachers, they develop a synergistic relationship that helps boost the school towards excellence in education. Together, we can make our school a first rate, world class school. ■

Mdm Chan Wan Mui *is the Vice-Principal of St Nicholas Girls' School.*

Parents As Partners (PAPA)

Lydia Foo

Introduction

"PAPA" stands for Parents as Partners in Education in Yumin Primary. The idea of forming a parent volunteer group was initiated by the school in February 1991. Letters were sent out to parents and a number of parents responded and showed interest in the idea. Two months later, 32 parents met at a get-together and formed an informal group to assist the school. In early 1992, a Chairman and a Secretary were elected. At that time, only 12 members made up the working committee. Today, there are 68 members in the working committee helping in the activities and programmes jointly organised by the school and PAPA.

Some parents are "Associate Members" meaning that their children have already left the school but they have stayed on to help in the committee. Many other parents offer their services for adhoc activities or when special projects are mounted. These parents do not have the time to sit in the working committee but will always give support in whatever way they can for they know that when parents help in projects, teachers will be able to give more attention to academic matters.

Objectives of the Committee

- To tap the expertise of parents to help the school, for the benefit of the pupils. It is also a channel for feedback from the parents.
- To foster a closer relationship between the school and parents for the benefit of all pupils.

The committee meets once a month on a Saturday afternoon. Members also give feedback on comments and suggestions from other parents who are not in the committee. We have a fantastic group of parents who work very well together. Probably one of the secrets of our success is that, they all work with one heart, without any hidden agenda. No personal benefits are expected. They respect each other's ideas and suggestions and any misunderstanding is quickly resolved in a mature manner. Parents of all races are welcome, regardless of their educational or social background. The only qualification required to join the committee is total dedication.

Members of the committee have been and are still helping in many projects in the school. These include:

- **Paired-Reading Programme**
  Three times a week, a session is run for students who are weak in reading. They are paired off with good readers. PAPA members supervise the sessions and help the weak readers too. This is to incul-

Parent Volunteer helping in the Paired Reading Programme.

cate a reading habit amongst the weak readers and to help them do well in their oral English examinations.

- **Sports Day**
  Members perform duties such as track judging, scoring and preparing the refreshment. They also help to train cheerleaders for the sports meet.
- **Fun Runs & Mass Jogs**
  These are organised by the school to improve the physical fitness of all pupils. Members help out as route marshals at these events.
- **Fund-raising**
  So far, they have organised three food & funfairs to raise funds. Some of the money raised was used to help poorer students of the school. Each fair saw a bigger amount of money raised.
- **Annual School Camps**
  In the earlier years, members went to the annual camp and cooked for the students and teachers. In more recent years, they are more involved in the activities of the pupils in the camp.

Parent Volunteer conducting Basic Skills Training.

- **School Excursions**
  Members accompany pupils and teachers on the many excursions organised by the school.
- **Library Duties**
  Members help in the library.
- **Teachers' Day Concert**
  Members organise the concert items and train pupils in the dances and drama. They also sew the costumes and make the props for the concert.
- **Children's Day Concert**
  Yearly, members contribute at least one item for the concert.
- **Basic Skills Training**
  This programme was initiated by the Principal in 1997. Every year, after the PSLE, members teach Pr. 6 students the art of sandwich-making and basic sewing. For 1999 pupils will be taught ironing skills and the making of salad or rojak.
- **Pr. 1 Registration Exercise**
  Members help out at this annual event.
- **Pr. 1 Pre-Orientation Programme**
  In this programme, new Pr. 1 pupils and their parents are brought on a guided tour of the school by the PAPA members in September just after the P1 registration. This is to help the more timid students get to know their new school so that they can settle in the school more easily the following year.
- **Pr. 1 Orientation Recess Package**
  Members are also present to help parents and pupils. All new Pr. 1 pupils are provided with a recess package during the first two weeks of school. Members help to guide the students to the correct tables in the canteen where food is laid out for them as well as check them on table manners.

Soccer Clinic with Fandi Ahmad.

- **Teachers' Contact Time**
  Every Wednesday afternoon, members help to keep an eye on the pupils in the hall while the teachers have their weekly meetings.
- **Computer Free Access Room**
  Members do shift duties so that the room can remain open for pupils who need to use the computers for their project work.
- **Computer Lab**
  Members come to help when there are workshops organised for parents.

Parent helping with the collection and distribution of used text books.

- **Open Dialogue Sessions**
  Every month dialogue sessions are organised for parents to come and give their comments, suggestions and opinions. This provides a channel for parents to have a direct link with the school. Members help in the organisation and note-taking.

They have also organised the following:

- Family Picnic at Pasir Ris Park
- Soccer Clinic with Fandi Ahmad
- Collection of used text books

The committee is now 8 years old. The membership has been steadily growing as more parents now realise the importance of a home-school link. We are also fortunate that we are getting tremendous support from the school, especially from our Principal and Vice-principal. Perhaps, if all parents do come with the sole intention of helping the school we will all be an important asset to the school. We certainly encourage all parents to be a volunteer in their children's schools. No matter how little time or effort put in it will definitely be appreciated.

In Yumin Primary School, although the committee is known as "PAPA", we do have a lot more 'mamas' than 'papas' in the committee. We are constantly on the lookout for fathers who can spare some time and share their expertise with us. It is not true that the ladies are all full-time home-makers, therefore they have a lot of time on their hands. More than half of the members have full-time jobs and utilise their annual leave time to help the school. So, fathers, you are definitely needed and we are waiting for you! ■

Mrs. Lydia Foo *is the Secretary of the PAPA Committee in Yumin Pr and an ardent parent supporter of the school.*

Parents as Partners-in-Education

Teo Bee Eng

Coral Primary is a new school and it started functioning in January 1999 with 12 classes of pupils in the afternoon session at the holding school, White Sands Primary School. The school strives to emphasize character development and the need to instill good discipline and a culture of care in all its pupils.

Our parent volunteers lend a helping hand on the first day of school.

The school also believes in working closely with the parents as strong parental involvement and close monitoring of the children's learning will accelerate their achievement. With that belief, the school works on a strong home-school partnership.

When teachers are having Contact Time, our parent volunteers incorporate fun while instilling core values in our pupils.

What we have been able to achieve in this short span of time is only possible due to the strong support and dedication of the parents of Coral Primary. Our school is indeed grateful to our parents who have served and contributed to the quality of school life of our pupils. Their support in our parent-teacher meetings and their presence at school events indeed speaks well of them as committed Partners-in-Education

Our parent volunteers have rendered their services in the following areas:

- Induction Programme for Primary One (Jan 99)
- Helping out During Teachers' Contact Time
- Story telling/ Teaching of Rhymes and Songs/ Craft work
- Celebration of events: Racial Harmony Day
  National Day cum Games Day
  Teachers' Day
- Helping out during the Clean-up of the classrooms as part of our Community Involvement Programme (CIP)
- Making of the backdrop/banner for the special events
- Helping out at Games Day

- Typing duties
- Processing of courseware for IT learning
- Accompanying the pupils on field trips

Our webpage, ***Coral Connection***, provides a platform for parents and the community to get to know about the school.

Having fun while helping out during Games Day.

Our website is:
http:// schools.moe.edu.sg/ coralps

Our homepage was set-up on 5 Jun 1999. It was through the support of two if our parent volunteers, Mrs Carol Cheong and Mr Looi Choon Poh that we could publish this webpage. The comments and feedback from parents on our website have been encouraging...

> *Hi, to principal and all teachers, I am happy my girl can study in this new school and I love your website. It is interesting and informative.*
> *Keep it up...*
>
> ***Elsie Lim***

> *Excellent job! Very informative and useful. Please keep up the good work.*
>
> ***Rahul S Jayawant***

Communication

A close working relationship with our parents in running our school activities and school events has led to a very open communication at all levels. At Coral Primary, we are also encouraged by the many kind words and compliments from parents. Here is an excerpt of a letter that has warmed our hearts....

> *I am the parent of Jeremy Cheah. I wish to commend you on how well you and your teachers have handled the children on their 1st day of school. You have done a good job in ensuring all things went orderly throughout the day. It is assuring to know that my child's school welfare is in good hands. Such dedication and commitment is truly appreciated.*
>
> ***Mrs D Cheah***

The school keeps parents informed of school events and school news through a bi-monthly newsletter, Coral Waves. Parents are also encouraged to contact the Principal directly by phone or e-mail, details of which are published in the Coral Waves.

Ms Teo Bee Eng *is the Principal of Coral Primary School.*

Internet for Grandparents

Celine Tan

In conjunction with the **UN Declared Year of Older Persons** and **RGS IT Week, BestCad** and ***Parents for RGS*** jointly organised an Internet Course for Grandparents in July 1999. The whole project began as a form of community work for our girls. Announcements were made to inform the students. Participants were not charged to attend. Those girls' whose grandparents were participating, had to fill in a form in which the grandparents indicated their areas of interest. The information was used to guide them to websites that would be of interest to them. Two instructors and some student facilitators were on hand to render more personalised help when needed. Most of the participants have internet access at home so they would have ample opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt on the programme.

Through this course, we hope to change the commonly held mindset that the Internet is a domain reserved only for the young and working adults. In fact, the government has been actively encouraging the public, both young and old to embrace the Internet, through its affordable Internet classes.

The Internet revolution is set to influence our lives and change the way we access information. No one can afford to be ignorant. If grandparents become knowledgeable in this area, they can serve as mentors, to advise and guide their grandchildren, while they surf the net. This is highly desirable considering that in Singapore, most of the children are from dual-income families. Internet supervision is crucial to young surfers, who may not be mature enough to be discerning with the content.

We were indeed pleased that we had the opportunity to introduce the Internet to our RGS grandparents and contribute in the government's effort to make the Internet accessible to all. Feedback from the participants was very positive. Rebekah Lin, granddaughter of Mr Lim Jit Onn, attended the Internet course with him. She has this to share with us:

"My grandfather and I learnt a lot about how to use the Internet and how to visit all those interesting sites. Now, my grandfather does his banking online! He says it's the "in" thing now. I benefited greatly from the experience as it taught me many things I never knew about the Internet. The instructor, Miss Tan was very nice and encouraging, she would send a student facilitator to help us if we had any problems. My grandfather was delighted when he received an email in his Hotmail account! After all the hardwork, there was tea and pastries that my grandfather enjoyed. It was a truly an enjoyable experience for the both of us."

Celine Tan *is a teacher in Raffles Girls' School*

Student facilitator explaining the finer points to net surfing ...

Come .. Let me show you how...

In conjunction with the UN Declared Year of Older Persons and RGS IT Week,

BestCad and Parents for RGS have jointly organised an Internet Course for Grand Parents.

Now, I can find out everything about my favourite country ...

Excuse me, I have got a question !

Can monitor my stocks and shares through the internet ....

Wow.. no more snail mail.

Parents as Resources In Peixin Primary School

Irene Ho

'.....it is the interaction of homes and schools that is the key to educability'

(Floud, 1965).

Introduction

This quotation very aptly sums up the importance of a triangular home-school partnership between children, their parents and teachers. Research studies show that strong home-school relations positively impact student achievement. In Singapore, there has also been greater awareness in schools that closer links with parents are essential for educational advance and parents are 'increasingly encouraged to get involved in their children's studies and in school activities' (Lee, 1995).

The first step undertaken by the school leadership, to harness parents' involvement in Peixin Primary School, as a creative and invaluable resource and to strengthen the triangular relationship between children, their parents and the school, was to embark on a WIT project.

In mid-February 1997, a WIT committee (Peixin Pulse) was set up in the school. The project 'Parents As Resources' grew out of a need to challenge the assumption that the extent to which school staff and parents work together to promote student learning correlates positively to increased student achievement and school effectiveness (Chrispeels and Meaney, 1989).

This project gained recognition in 1998 when the team was rewarded with a Silver award at NQCC level and the school was featured over TCS channels 5 and 8 in the series 'When The Bell Rings'. With this promising start, the school integrated the following four-step process as its implementation strategy:

Steps in A Practical Partnership Programme

Step 1: Clear School Mission

At Peixin Primary School, the Principal, teachers, parents and pupils work in a caring and thinking environment, growing as a family and glowing as a school.

Parent helping at a Roller-blading session.

Parents helping at a cycling session.

Peixin Primary School's mission statement was revised in 1998 to embrace parental involvement. The new philosophy clearly articulates the school's intent and preparedness to involve parents in their children's studies and in school activities and to foster co-operation between parents and schools in various ways.

Step 2: Principal's Role in Implemention

The successful implementation of the partnership programme demands effective leadership, an informed staff and committed parents. To strengthen the partnership, the Principal carried out the following:

- Early collaboration and participation by parents in the decision-making process to empower parents and teachers and to increase their commitment (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976). Firstly, all parents were invited in January, to volunteer their services through a survey questionnaire. A month before the P1 registration exercise, the principal conducted talks on P1 entry skills to the public. Parents whose children were registered with the school subsequently were encouraged to join as parent volunteers.
- Secondly, the knowledge base of teachers and parents was established so that both parties acknowledged the importance of the school policy, identified with its vision and appreciated the crucial stake they have in the success of the pupils. This was achieved in early 1998, through several informal chit-chat sessions. Functions such as Mothers' Day celebrations, and tea parties to celebrate school successes served to strengthen the vision and philosophy for strong home-school relations.
- Thirdly, the policy and school goals were communicated to teachers and parents. At the same time, their concerns were ameliorated and one sure way of ensuring this was to establish close, consistent and regular communication. This was secured through workshop sessions conducted by the Principal on the teaching of reading skills, management of good discipline and IT skills. Teachers acted as faciltators. As a result, a strong bond was developed between staff, parents and pupils.
- Fourthly, the programme was carefully co-ordinated to ensure continuity and to strive toward the successful implementation of a 'well-planned, comprehensive and long-lasting' programme.

Step 3: Multi-Level Structure

A multi-level leadership team towards effective partnership was established:

Principal

Vice-Principal

Parent-Teacher Partnership Committee
(Volunteer Parents and Parent-Teacher Partnership Co-ordinator)

Step 4: Roles Definition

The school identified various roles for these parents to carry out. Hence, within the school, parents assumed a variety of roles. As volunteers, parents acted as partners-in-education by helping out in ECAs such as Chinese Dance, Netball, hikes, camps, celebrations such as National Education Fair (Cluster), Science Fair, Open house, Speech Day, Children's Day, the Hydroponics Garden, Adopt-A-Park scheme, visits to the Sreenarayana Home and the Woody Lodge Home. Besides accompanying staff and children on journeys, repairing and mending library books, parents also make minor repairs and renovations to the school building. Their involvement was geared to a specific time and task.

Moreover, parents served as resources in the school's instructional programme. As volunteers, they provide assistance in reading in the library and in the teaching of phonics in the Learning Support Programme. Parents are invited to conduct assembly talks on culture, for example, Filipino, Indian lifestyles, food, festivals etc.

Framework Of Activities

The school further developed the following 9-point programme for an effective partnership between parents and teachers in the school based on the study of the principles proposed by Berger (1978), Long (1986), Atkins et al (1988) and Macbeth (1989).

1 A Welcoming System

An Open-Door Policy

The school adopts an open-door policy. This is worked out largely by setting up a welcoming system. Parents are welcomed, not only when the child is first admitted, but all the times, both in the sense of being greeted in a friendly and courteous manner and in the sense of encouraging them to feel that they are part of the school community.

Contacts Early in the Year

Meetings with parents are held at almost all levels. The message to parents that the school cares is important.

Two-way Communication Throughout the Year

A two-way communication pattern is encouraged for school personnel to meet the children and their parents even before a problem emerges so that the climate is set for parents and the school to work together on behalf of, rather than suffer a confrontation over a child. Parents play an active role in establishing communication with the school during visits to the school, parent-teacher conferences and involvement in school activities.

Specific Events

Parents are invited for specific events, complemented by an open invitation to parents to participate in ongoing educational programs. Outside the classroom or just inside the door, teachers display assignments for the week, and good work by the children.

Visits to the Classroom

Visits to the classroom allow parents to become acquainted with their child's educational environment, the other children in the room and the teacher. Conferences are held periodically to continue the dialogue on the educational progress of the child. Participation in school activities allow parents to become co-educators.

Setting up a Family Centre

Parents are provided with a place in the school where they can meet, share information, work and relax. A family corner is equipped and stocked with items provided by parents such as benches, tables, bulletin board and reading materials.

2 Written Reports or Profiles

The result slip of each child is presented to parents at least twice a year with detailed comments by teachers about a child's attainment, effort and behaviour. This report is an agenda for a consultation at least twice a year, between parents and teachers to plan the child's next phase of learning.

3 A Private Consultation

Private and comfortable meeting place

To achieve open two-way communication, parents and teachers talk in confidence in a private and comfortable place, just outside the General Office.

Quick Conferences

Quick conferences with parents are conducted in the Staff Lounge or the Parents' Corner, when parents pick up their child.

4 Class Meetings

A class meeting is scheduled every term to explain to those parents with children in the same class, the nature of the coming term's curriculum and how parents can reinforce it in the home.

5 A Parents' Association

The school plans to set up a formal advisory council whereby parents can be involved as policymakers. The Parent Teacher Organisation will be open to all parents with children in the school. Instrumental to the success of the Parent-Teacher Organisation (PTO) is the need to ensure that its main concerns should be educational provision and parent-teacher links, its main functions being consultation and information. Materials will also be published for parents and the PTO will be encouraged to sponsor potluck dinners or organise carnivals to promote a community spirit. In this way, the PTO will serve as an avenue towards greater parent-school interaction.

6 Publications

Communication in Peixin Primary School ranges from the simplest note sent home by the teacher to news reports on the programmes in the school – such as the Adopt-A-Park scheme, Science Fair, Parents As Resources programme – in the media. Parents know what is happening at school and are interested in program development and curriculum decisions. Publications by the school through the *Peixin Pulse*, to keep parents informed, are prepared in collaboration with staff and parent volunteers. Forms of communication include:

1) One-way communication such as simple notices. A notice is used by the school as a message from the Principal, or it may be sent home by each teacher. It is a formal, but simple form of one-way communication.

2) Spontaneous Notes and Happy-grams
   Notes written by teachers, on the spur of the moment and happy-grams or 'Gladgrams' in pupils' diaries are carried home by pupils. They are excellent mechanisms for teachers to periodically report something positive about each child. The concept behind each of these formats is the same – to communicate with the parent in a positive manner, thereby improving both parent-teacher relations and the child's concept.

7 Dialogues between the School and Parents

Brief parent-teacher dialogues through telephone calls make the welcome more personal and encourage specific participation. An early telephone call produces many benefits from appreciative parents. Instead of contacting parents only when something is amiss, the tradition is changed by setting aside a short period for making telephone calls to parents. Notes are also be sent to parents to ask for convenient times to call.

8 A System of Home Visits

Home Visits

Teachers make efforts to visit their students' homes as a way of reaching parents who have no telephone. Teachers who devote the time required have found it a rewarding experience.

Neighbourhood Visits

Visits to the neighbourhood are excellent ways to meet parents. Rather than waiting until the regular conference period arrives or when a problem has arisen, teachers contact parents early in the year.

9 Teaching as a Service to Assist Parent Partners

Parent Education Meetings

Parents become volunteer resources for the school through Parent Education meetings, which teach them to be effective tutors and volunteers in the school. They share their talents or experiences with the school in activities such as needlework, storytelling, leading dance projects, etc. The school plans to further engage parents as volunteers in the following activities:

* washing and ironing school sports gear
* making costumes and scenery for school plays
* general classroom help – setting up and clearing up
* getting involved in school building projects
* helping with holiday play schemes
* helping with a creche to enable other parents to leave children and attend school functions

School Programs and Workshops

The school plans to offer programs and workshops to explain new terminology in different subjects. Parents can then plan and implement some of the workshops. Speakers can also be obtained from among them and projects can be started such as bookmaking projects, etc.

Suggestion Box

A suggestion box has been employed to bring in suggestions from parents to the school.

Learning Centres

Parents, as volunteers, are in charge of learning centres such as:

* a Reading Centre
* a Science Area
* an Art Project Centre

Conclusion

Parents are the continuous force in the education of their children from birth to adulthood. They represent a valuable but often unacknowledged resource which can be tapped to great effect in the education of children and young people. Peixin Primary School has structured a successful 9-point programme to foster effective partnership with parents of my school.

An essential strategy was for the school to recognise parents as first-line clients and strive towards including parents as 'active' partners. Parents have a clear understanding of school goals through frequent communication. The school shares with parents ways in which they can help meet school goals. Ample opportunities are provided for parents and community members to participate in school functions and activities. Multiple means are used to communicate with parents, including a diary, newsletter, notes home, telephone calls, parent/teacher conferences, home visits, celebrations and meetings. Parents are given information to help their children at home.

By setting the right climate, the school has succeeded in encouraging parents to play a key role in primary education by capitalising on the positive potential of the 'parent-child learning bond' in support of teachers' efforts.

A successful partnership in the school will lead to: a greater willingness from both parents and teachers to mutually intervene on the child's behalf; a greater confidence in tackling school-related activities at home; a wider commitment to the life and work of the school and a deeper interest in the processes of education. In short, in the words of John Coe (1984),

> *'The finest school will be even finer when it acknowledges the powerful contributions of every parent.'* ■

Irene Ho *is the Principal of Peixin Primary School.*

School, Family and Community Partnerships

Joyce L. Epstein

Caring for the Children We Share

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.

What do successful partnership programs look like? How can practices be effectively designed and implemented? What are the results of better communications, interactions, and exchanges across these three important contexts? These questions have challenged research and practice, creating an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into school, family, and community partnerships with "caring" as a core concept.

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence: Understanding the Theory

Schools make choices. They might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the three spheres of influence that directly affect student learn-

ing and development relatively separate. Or they might conduct many high-quality communications and interactions designed to bring all three spheres of influence closer together. With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school.

. . . partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes.

The *external* model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that the three major contexts in which students learn and grow – the family, the school, and the community – may be drawn together or pushed apart. In this model, there are some practices that schools, families, and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development. The *internal* model of the interaction of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community. These social relationships may be enacted and studied at an *institutional* level (e.g., when a school invites all families to an event or sends the same communications to all families) at an *individual* level (e.g., when a parent and a teacher meet in conference or talk by phone). Connections between schools or parents and community groups, agencies, and services can also be represented and studied within the model.[1]

The model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the student at the center. The inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes. The assumption is that if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of students they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills and talents and to remain in school.

Interestingly and somewhat ironically, studies indicate that students are also crucial for the success of school, family, and community partnerships. Students are often their parents' main source of information about school. In strong partnership programs, teachers help students understand and conduct traditional communications with families (e.g., delivering memos or report cards)

and new communications (e.g., interacting with family members about homework or participating in parent-teacher-student conferences). As we gain more information about the role of students in partnerships, we are developing a more complete understanding of how schools, families, and communities must work with students to increase their chances for success.

How Theory Sounds in Practice

In some schools, there are still educators who say, "If the family would just do its job, we could do our job." And there are still families who say, "I raised this child; now it is your job to educate her." These words embody the theory of "separate spheres of influence." Other educators say, "I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the support of this community." And some parents say, "I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child." These phrases embody the theory of "overlapping spheres of influence."

In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-like* schools. A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. In a partnership, parents create more *school-like* families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success. Communities, including groups of parents working together, create school-like opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create *family-like* settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children. *Community-minded* families and students help their neighborhoods and other families. The concept of a community school is re-emerging. It refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day.

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Schools and communities talk about programs and services that are "family-friendly" – meaning that they take into account the needs and realities of family life in the 1990s, are feasible to conduct, and are equitable toward all families. When all these concepts combine, children experience *learning communities or caring communities.*[2]

All these terms are consistent with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, but they are not abstract concepts. You will find them daily in conversations, news stories, and celebrations of many kinds. In a family-like school, a teacher might say, "I know when a student is having a bad day and how to help him along." A student might slip and call a teacher "mom" or "dad" and then laugh with a mixture of embarrassment and glee. In a school-like family, a parent might say, "I make sure my daughter knows that homework comes first." A boy might raise his hand to speak at the dinner table and then joke about acting as if he were still in school. When communities reach out to students and their families, youngster might say, "This program really made my schoolwork make sense!" Parents or educators might comment, "This community really supports its schools."

They may remember how a teacher paid individual attention to them, recognized their uniqueness, or praised them for real progress, just as a parent might.

Once people hear about such concepts as family-like schools or school-like families, they remember positive examples of schools, teachers, and places in the community that were "like a family" to them. They may remember how a teacher paid individual attention to them, recognized their uniqueness, or praised them for real progress, just as a parent might. Or they might recall things at home that were "just like school" and supported their work as a student, or they might remember community activities that made them feel smart or good about themselves and their families. They will recall that parents, siblings, and other family members engaged in and enjoyed educational activities and took pride in the good schoolwork or homework that they did, just as a teacher might.

How Partnerships Work in Practice

These terms and examples are evidence of the *potential* for schools, families, and communities to create caring educational environments. It is possible to have a school that is excellent academically; but ignores families. However, that school will build barriers between teachers, parents, and children – barriers that affect school life and learning. It is possible to have a school that is ineffective academically but involves families in many good ways. With its weak academic program, that school will short-change students' learning. Neither of these schools exemplifies a caring, educational environment that requires academic excellence, good communication, and productive interactions involving school, family, and community.

Some children succeed in school without much family involvement or despite family neglect or distress, particularly if the school

has excellent academic and support programs. Teachers, relatives outside the immediate family, other families, and members of the community can provide important guidance and encouragement to these students. As support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education work to achieve to their full potential, build positive attitudes and school behaviors, and stay in school. The shared interests and investments of schools, families, and communities create the conditions of caring that work to "overdetermine" the likelihood of student success.[3]

Any practice can be designed and implemented well or poorly. And even well-implemented partnership practice may not be useful to all families. In a caring school community, participants work continually to improve the nature and effects of partnerships. Although the interactions of educators, parents, students and community members will not always be smooth or successful, partnership programs establish a base of respect and trust on which to build. Good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained – even strengthened – after differences have been resolved. Without this firm base, disagreements and problems that are sure to arise about schools and students will be harder to solve.

Good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained – even strengthened – after differences have been resolved.

What Research Says

In surveys and field studies involving teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, some important patterns relating to partnerships have emerged.[4]

- Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, *unless* schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level.
- Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' family.
- Schools in more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, *unless* they work at developing balanced partnership programs that include contacts about positive accomplishments of students.
- Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers are less

involved, on average, at the school building, *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children.

Researchers have also drawn the following conclusions:

- Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education.
- Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about build positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a "rhetoric rut," in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action.
- Just about all students at all levels – elementary, middle, and high school – want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need much better information and guidance than most now receive about how their schools view partnerships and about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions.

The research results are important because they indicate that caring communities can be built, on purpose . . .

The research results are important because they indicate that caring communities can be built, on purpose; that they include families that might not become involved on their own; and that, by their own reports, just about all families, students, and teachers believe that partnerships are important for helping students succeed across the grades.

Good programs will look different in each site, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the needs and interests, time and talents, and ages and grade levels of students and their families. However, there are some commonalities across successful programs at all grade levels. These include a recognition of the overlapping spheres of influence on student development; attention to various types of involvement that promote a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together; and an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships to coordinate each school's work and progress.

Six Types of Involvement – Six Types of Caring

A framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. The framework (summarized in the accompanying tables) helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practice.[5]

Each type of involvement induces many different *practices* of partnership (see Table 1.1). Each type presents particular *challenges* that must be met in order to involve all families and needed *redefinitions* of some basic principles of involvement (see Table 1.2). Finally, each type is likely to lead to different *results* for students, for parents, for teaching practice, and for school climate (see Table 1.3). Thus, schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals. The tables provide examples of practices, challenges for successful implementation, redefinitions for up-to-date understanding, and results that have been documented and observed.

TABLE I.1 Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership, and Sample Practices

Type 1 *Parenting*	*Type 2* *Communicating*	*Type 3* *Volunteering*	*Type 4* *Learning at Home*	*Type 5* *Decision Making*	*Type 6* *Collaborating With Community*
Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and their children's progress	Recruit and organize parent help and support	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development
			Sample Practices		
Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level Workshops, video tapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing for each age and grade level Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy) Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services Home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school; neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families	Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed Language translators assist families, as needed Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments Parent-student pick-up of report cards, with conferences on improving grades Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions	School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs	Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class Calendars with activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community Family math, science, and reading activities at school Summer learning packets or activities Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work	Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement Information on school or local elections for school representatives Networks to link all families with parent representatives	Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others) Participation of alumni in school programs for students

TABLE I.2 **Challenges and Redefinitions for the Successful Design and Implementation of the Six Types of Involvement**

			Challenges		
Type 1 *Parenting*	*Type 2* *Communicating*	*Type 3* *Volunteering*	*Type 4* *Learning at Home*	*Type 5* *Decision Making*	*Type 6* *Collaborating With Community*
Provide information to all families who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building Enable families to share information about culture, background, children's talents and needs Make sure that all information for families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school	Review the read-ability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type Review the quality of major communications (e.g, the schedule, content, and structure of conferences; newsletters; report cards; and others) Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home	Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable employed parents to participate Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive	Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bi-monthly) that gives students responsibility for discussing important things they are learning, and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers Involve families with their children in all important curriculum-related decisions	Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups in the school Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups	Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education
			Redefinitions		
"Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time; "workshop" also may mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, anytime	"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean: two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community	"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time – not just during the school day and at the school building	"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking school-work to real life "Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing – not "teaching" school subjects	"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families	"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools

TABLE I.3 Expected Results for Students, Parents, and Teachers of the Six Types of Involvement

Type 1 Parenting	*Type 2 Communicating*	*Type 3 Volunteering*	*Type 4 Learning at Home*	*Type 5 Decision Making*	*Type 6 Collaborating With Community*
Results for Students					
Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework Good or improved attendance Awareness of importance of school	Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct Informed decisions about courses and programs Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator	Skill in communicating with adults Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers	Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork Homework completion Positive attitude toward schoolwork View of parent as more similar to teacher, and home as more similar to school Self-concept of ability as learner	Awareness of representation of families in school decisions Understanding that student rights are protected Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students	Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences Awareness of careers and options for future education and work Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community
Results for Parents					
Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting Feeling of support from school and other parents	Understanding school programs and policies Monitoring and awareness of child's progress Responding effectively to child's problems Interactions with teachers and ease of communications with school and teachers	Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carryover of school activities at home Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children, or to take steps to improve own education Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school Gains in specific skills of volunteer work	Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year Discussions of school, classwork, and homework Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject Appreciation of teaching skills Awareness of child as a learner	Input into policies that affect child's education Feeling of ownership of school Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions Shared experiences and connections with other families Awareness of school, district, and state policies	Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents, or to obtain needed services Interactions with other families in community activities Awareness of school's role in the community, and of the community's contributions to the school
Results for Teachers					
Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children Respect for families' strengths and efforts Understanding of student diversity Awareness of own skills to share information on child development	Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly Appreciation and use of parent network for communications Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress	Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school Awareness of parent talents and interests in school and children Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers	Better design of homework assignments Respect of family time Recognition of equal helpfulness of single parent, dual income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning Satisfaction with family involvement and support	Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles	Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services

Charting the Course

The entries in the tables are illustrative. The sample practices displayed in Table 1.1 are only a few of hundreds that may be selected or designed for each type of involvement. Although all schools may use the framework of six types as a guide, each school must chart its own course in choosing practices to meet the needs of its families and students.

The challenges shown (Table 1.2) are just a few of the many that relate to the examples. There are challenges – that is, problems – for every practice of partnership, and they must be resolved in order to reach and engage all families in the best ways. Often, when one challenge is met, a new one will emerge.

The redefinitions (also in Table 1.2) redirect old notions so that involvement is not viewed solely as or measured only by "bodies in the building." As examples, the table calls for redefinitions of workshops, communication, volunteers, homework, decision making, and community. By redefining these familiar terms, it is possible for partnership programs to reach out in new ways to many more families.

The selected results (Table 1.3) should help correct the widespread misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children's achievement test scores. Instead, in the short term, certain practices are more likely than others to influence students' skills and scores, while other practices are more likely to affect attitudes and behaviors. Although students are the main focus of partnerships, the various types of involvement also promote various kinds of results for parents and for teachers. For example, the expected results for parents include not only leadership in decision making but also confidence about parenting, productive curriculum-related interactions with children, and many interactions with other parents and the school. The expected results for teachers include not only improved parent-teacher conferences or school-homes communications but also better understanding of families, new approaches to homework, and other connections with families and the community.

. . . each school must chart its own course in choosing practices to meet the needs of its families and students.

Most of the results noted in Table 1.3 have been measured in at least one research study and observed as schools conduct their work. The entries are listed in positive terms to indicate the results of well-designed and well-implemented practices. It should be fully understood, however, that results may be negative if poorly designed practices exclude families or create greater

barriers to communication and exchange. Research is still needed on the results of specific practices of partnership in various schools, at various grade levels, and for diverse populations of students, families, and teachers. It will be important to confirm, extend, or correct the information on results listed in Table 1.3 if schools are to make purposeful choices among practices that foster various types of involvement.

The tables cannot show the connections that occur when one practice activates several types of involvement simultaneously. For example, volunteers may organize and conduct a food bank (Type 3) that allows parents to pay $115 for $30 worth of food for their families (Type 1). The food may be subsidized by community agencies (Type 6). The recipients might then serve as volunteers for the program or in the community (perpetuating Type 3 and Type 6 activities). Consider another example: An after-school homework club run by volunteers and the community recreation department combines Type 3 and type 6 practices. Yet it also serves as a Type 1 activity because the after-school program assists families with the supervision of their children. This practice may also alter the way homework interactions are conducted between students and parents at home (Type 4). These and other connections are interesting, and research is needed to understand the combined effects of such activities.

The tables also simplify the complex longitudinal influences that produce various results over time. For example, a series of events might play out as follows. The involvement of families in reading at home leads students to give more attention to reading and to be more strongly motivated to read. This in turn may help students maintain or improve their daily reading skills and then their reading grades. With the accumulation over time of good classroom reading programs, continued home support, and increased skills and confidence in reading, students may significantly improve their reading achievement test scores. The time between reading aloud at home and increased reading test score may vary greatly, depending on the quality and quantity of other reading activities in school and out.

Consider yet another example. A study by Seyong Lee, using longitudinal data and rigorous statistical controls on background and prior influences, found important benefits for high school students' attitudes and grades as a result of continuing several types of family involvement from the middle school into the high school. However, achievement test scores were not greatly affected by partnerships at the high school level. Longitudinal stud-

. . . found important benefits for high school students' attitudes and grades as a result of continuing several types of family involvement from the middle school into the high school.

ies and practical experiences that are monitored over time are needed to increase our understanding of the complex patterns of results that can develop from various partnership activities.[6]

The six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers. The results for students, parents, and teachers will depend on the particular types of involvement that are implemented as well as on quality of the implementation.

Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Who will work to create caring school communities that are based on the concepts of partnership? How will the necessary work on all six types of involvement get done? Although as a principal or a teacher may be a leader in working with some families or with groups in the community, one person cannot create a lasting, comprehensive program that involves all families as their children progress through the grades.

The action team guides the development of a comprehensive program of partnerships, including all six types of involvement, and the integration of all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program.

From the hard work of many educators and families in many schools, we have learned that, along with clear policies and strong support from state and district leaders and from school principals, an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships in each school is an essential structure. The action team guides the development of a comprehensive program of partnerships, including all six types of involvement, and the integration of all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program. The trials and errors and the efforts and insights of many schools in our projects have helped identify five important steps that any school can take to develop more positive school-family-community connections.[7]

Step 1: Create an Action Team

A team approach is an appropriate way to build partnerships. The Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships can be the "action arm" of a school council, if one exists. The action team takes responsibility for assessing present practices, organizing options for new partnerships, implementing selected activities, evaluating next steps, and continuing to improve and coordinate practices for all six types of involvement. Although the members of the action team lead these activities,

they are assisted by other teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members.

The action team should include at least three teachers from different grade levels, three parents with children in different grade levels, and at least one administrator. Teams may also include at least one member from the community at large and, at the middle and high school levels, at least two students from different grade levels. Others who are central to the school's work with families may also be included as members, such as a cafeteria worker, a school social worker, a counselor, or a school psychologist. Such diverse membership ensures that partnership activities will take into account the various needs, interests, and talents of teachers, parents, the school, and students.

The leader of the action team may be any member who has the respect of the other members and has good communication skills and an understanding of the partnership approach.

The leader of the action team may be any member who has the respect of the other members and has good communication skills and an understanding of the partnership approach. The leader or at least one member of the action team should also serve on the school council, school improvement team, or other such body, if one exists.

In addition to group planning, members of the action team elect (or are assigned to act as) the chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees for each type of involvement. A team with at least six members (and perhaps as many as 12) ensures that responsibilities for leadership can be delegated so that one person is not overburdened and so that the work of the action team will continue even if members move or change schools or positions. Members may serve renewable terms of two to three years, with replacement of any who leave in the interim. Other thoughtful variations in assignments and activities may be created by small or large schools using this process.

In the first phase of our work in 1987, projects were led by "project directors" (usually teachers) and were focused on one type of involvement at a time. Some schools succeeded in developing good partnerships over several years, but others were thwarted if the project director moved, if the principal changed, or if the project grew larger than one person could handle. Other schools took a team approach in order to work on many types of involvement simultaneously. Their efforts demonstrated how to structure the program for the next set of schools in our work. Starting in 1990, this second set of schools tested and improved on the structure and work of action teams. Now, all elementary, middle, and high schools in our research and development projects, and

in other states and districts that are applying this work, are given assistance in taking the action team approach.

Step 2: Obtain Funds and Other Support

A modest budget is needed to guide and support the work and expenses of each school's action team. Funds for state coordinators to assist districts and schools and funds for district coordinators or facilitators to help each school may come from a number of sources. These include federal, state, and local programs that mandate, request, or support family involvement, such as Title I, Title II, Title VII, Goals 2000, and other federal and similar state funding programs. Besides paying the state and district coordinators, funds from these sources may be applied in creative ways to support staff development in the area of school, family, and community partnerships; to pay for lead teachers at each school; to set up demonstration programs; and for other partnership expenses. In addition, local school-business partnerships, school discretionary funds, and separate fund-raising efforts targeted to the schools' partnership programs have been used to support the work of their action teams. At the very least, a school's action team requires a small stipend (at least $1,000 per year for three to five years, with summer supplements) for time and materials needed by each sub-committee to plan, implement, and revise practices of partnership that include all six types of involvement.

The action team must also be given sufficient time and social support to do its work. This requires explicit support from the principal and district leaders to allow time for team members to meet, plan, and conduct the activities that are selected for each type of involvement. Time during the summer is also valuable – and may be essential – for planning new approaches that will start in the new school year.

A modest budget is needed to guide and support the work and expenses of each school's action team.

Step 3: Identify Starting Points

Most schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time. How can good practices be organized and extended so that they may be used by all teachers, at all grade levels, with all families? The action team works to improve and systematize the typically haphazard patterns of involvement. It starts by collecting information about the school's present practices of partnership, along with the views, experiences, and wishes of teachers, parents, administrators, and students.

Assessments of starting points may be made in a variety of ways, depending on available resources, time, and talents. For example, the action team might use formal questionnaires[8] or telephone interviews to survey teachers, administrators, parents, and students (if resources exist to process, analyze, and report survey data). Or the action team might organize a panel of teachers, parents, and students to speak at a meeting of the parent-teacher organization or at some other school meeting as a way of initiating discussion about the goals and desired activities for partnership. Structured discussions may be conducted through a series of principal's breakfasts for representative groups of teachers, parents, students, and others; random sample phone calls may also be used to collect reactions and ideas; or formal focus groups may be convened to gather ideas about school, family, and community partnerships at the school.

Assessments of starting points may be made in a variety of ways, depending on available resources, time, and talents.

What questions should be addressed? Regardless of how the information is gathered, the following areas must be covered in any information gathering:

- *Present strengths.* Which practices of school-family-community-partnerships are now working well for the school as a whole? For individual grade levels? For which types of involvement?
- *Needed changes.* Ideally, how do we want school, family, and community partnerships to work at this school three years from now? Which present practices should continue, and which should change? To reach school goals, what new practices are needed for each of the major types of involvement?
- *Expectations.* What do teachers expect of families? What do families expect of teachers and other school personnel? What do students expect their families to do to help them negotiate school life? What do students expect their teachers to do to keep their families informed and involved?
- *Sense of community.* Which families are we now reaching, and which are we not yet reaching? Who are the "hard-to-reach" families? What might be done to communicate with the engage these families in their children's education? Are current partnership practices coordinated to include all families as a school community? Or, are families whose children receive special services (e.g., Title I, special education, bilingual education) separated from other families?
- *Links to goals.* How are students faring on such measures of academic achievement as report card grades, on measures of attitudes and attendance, and on other indicators of success? How might family and community connections assist

the school in helping more students reach higher goals and achieve greater success? Which practices of school, family, and community partnerships would directly connect to particular goals?

Step 4: Develop a Three-Year Plan

From the ideas and goals for partnerships collected from teachers, parents, and students, the action team can develop a three-year outline of the specific steps that will help the school progress from its starting point on each type of involvement to where it wants to be in three years. This plan outlines how each subcommittee will work over three years to make important, incremental advances to reach more families each year on each type of involvement. The three-year outline also shows how all school-family-community connections will be integrated into one coherent program of partnerships that includes activities for the whole school community, activities to meet the special needs of children and families, activities to link to the district committees and councils, and activities conducted in each grade level.

Besides the three-year outline of goals for each type of involvement, a detailed one-year plan should be developed for the first year's work. It should include the specific activities that will be implemented, improved, or maintained for each type of involvement; a timeline of monthly actions needed for each activity; identification of the subcommittee chair who will be responsible for each type of involvement; identification of the teachers, parents, students, or others (not necessarily action team members) who will assist with the implementation of each activity; indicators of how the implementation and results of each major activity will be assessed; and other details of importance to the action team.

. . . the action team can develop a three-year outline of the specific steps that will help the school progress from its starting point on each type of involvement to where it wants to be in three years.

The three-year outline and one-year detailed plan are shared with the school council and/or parent organization, with all teachers, and with the parents and students. Even if the action team makes only one good step forward each year on each of the six types of involvement, it will take 18 steps forward over three years to develop a more comprehensive and coordinated program of school-family-community partnerships.

In short, based on the input from the parents, teachers, students, and others on the school's starting points and desired partnerships, the action team will address these issues.

- *Details.* What will be done each year, for three years, to implement a program on all six types of involvement? What, specifically, will be accomplished in the first year on each type of involvement?
- *Responsibilities.* Who will be responsible for developing and implementing practices of partnership for each type of involvement? Will staff development be needed? How will teachers, administrators, parents, and students be supported and recognized for their work?
- *Costs.* What costs are associated with the improvement and maintenance of the planned activities? What sources will provide the needed funds? Will small grants or other special budgets be needed?
- *Evaluation.* How well have the practices been implemented and what are the effects on students, teachers, and families? What indicators will we use that are closely linked to the practices implemented to determine their effects?

The action team should schedule an annual presentation and celebration of progress at the school so that all teachers, families, and students will know about the work that has been done each year to build partnerships.

Step 5: Continue Planning and Working

The action team should schedule an annual presentation and celebration of progress at the school so that all teachers, families, and students will know about the work that has been done each year to build partnerships. Or, the district coordinator for school, family, and community partnerships might arrange an annual conference for all schools in the district. At the annual school or district meeting, the action team presents and displays the highlights of accomplishments on each type of involvement. Problems are discussed and ideas are shared about improvements, additions, and continuations for the next year.

Each year, the action team updates the school's three-year outline and develops a detailed one-year plan for the coming year's work. It is important for educators, families, students, and the community at large to be aware of annual progress, of new plans, and of how they can help.

In short, the action team addresses as the following questions: How can it ensure that the program of school-family-community partnerships will continue to improve its structure, processes, and practices in order to increase the number of families who are partners with the school in their children's education? What opportunities will teachers, parents, and students have to share information on successful practices and to strengthen and maintain their efforts?

Characteristics of Successful Programs

As schools have implemented partnership programs, their experience has helped to identify some important properties of successful partnerships.

INCREMENTAL PROGRESS

Progress in partnerships is incremental, including more families each year in ways that benefit more students. Like reading or math programs, assessment programs, sports programs, or other school investments, partnership programs take time to develop, must be periodically reviewed, and should be continuously improved. The schools in our projects have shown that three years is the minimum time needed for an action team to complete a number of activities on each type of involvement and to establish its work as a productive and permanent structure in a school.

The development of a partnership is a process, not a single event. All teachers, families, students, and community groups do not engage in all activities on all types of involvement all at once. Not all activities implemented will succeed with all families. But with good planning, thoughtful implementation, well-designed activities, and pointed improvements, more and more families and teachers can learn to work with one another on behalf of the children whose interests they share. Similarly, not all students instantly improve their attitudes or achievements when their families become involved in their education. After all, student learning depends mainly on good curricula and instruction and on the work completed by students. However, with a well-implemented program of partnerships, more students will receive support from their families, and more will be motivated to work harder.

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CONNECTION TO CURRICULAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL REFORM

A program of school-family-community partnerships that focuses on children's learning and development is an important component of curricular and instructional reform. Aspects of partnerships that aim to help more students succeed in school can be supported by federal, state, and local funds targeted for curricular and instructional reform. Helping families understand, monitor, and interact with students on homework, for example, can be a clear and important extension of classroom instruction as can volunteer programs that bolster and broaden student skills, talents, and interests. Improving the content and conduct of par-

ent-teacher-student conferences and goal setting activities can be an important step in curricular reform; family support and family understanding of child and adolescent development and school curricula are necessary elements to assist students as learners.

The connection of partnerships to curriculum and instruction in schools and the location of leadership for these partnership programs in district departments of curriculum and instruction are important changes that move partnerships from being peripheral public relations activities about parents to being central programs about student learning and development.

It is important to note that the development of partnership programs would be easier if educators came to their schools prepared to work productively with families and communities.

REDEFINING STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The action team approach to partnerships guides the work of educators by restructuring "staff development" to mean colleagues working together and with parents to develop, implement, evaluate, and continue to improve practices of partnership. This is less a "dose of inservice education" than it is an active form of developing staff talents and capacities. The teachers, administrators, and others on the action team become the "experts" on this topic for their school. Their work in this area can be supported by various federal, state, and local funding programs as a clear investment in staff development for overall school reform. Indeed, the action team approach as outlined can be applied to any or all important topics on a school improvement agenda. It need not be restricted to the pursuit of successful partnerships.

It is important to note that the development of partnership programs would be easier if educators came to their schools prepared to work productively with families and communities. Courses or classes are needed in preservice teacher education and in advanced degree programs for teachers and administrators to help them define their professional work in terms of partnerships. Today, most educators enter schools without an understanding of family backgrounds, concepts of caring, the framework of partnerships, or the other "basics" I have discussed here. Thus, most principals and district leaders are not prepared to guide and lead their staffs in developing strong school and classroom practices that inform and involve families. And most teachers and administrators are not prepared to understand, design, implement, or evaluate good practices of partnership with the families of their students. Colleges and universities that prepare educators and others who work with children and families should identify where in their curricula the theory, research, policy,

and practical ideas about partnerships are presented or where in their programs these can be added.[9]

Even with improved preservice and advanced coursework, however, each school's action team will have to tailor its menu of practices to the needs and wishes of the teachers, families, and students in the school. The framework and guidelines offered in this chapter can be used by thoughtful educators to organize this work, school by school. ■

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Teacher's Clipboard...

"If you promise not to believe everything your child says happens at this school, I'll promise not to believe everything he says happens at home."

English teacher, in a note to parents

"I do not simply teach the mind, I reach the heart, and when I reach the heart, I touch the soul."

Zev Schosack

"The only reason I always try to meet and know the parents better is because it helps me to forgive their children."

Louis Johannot

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Singapore)

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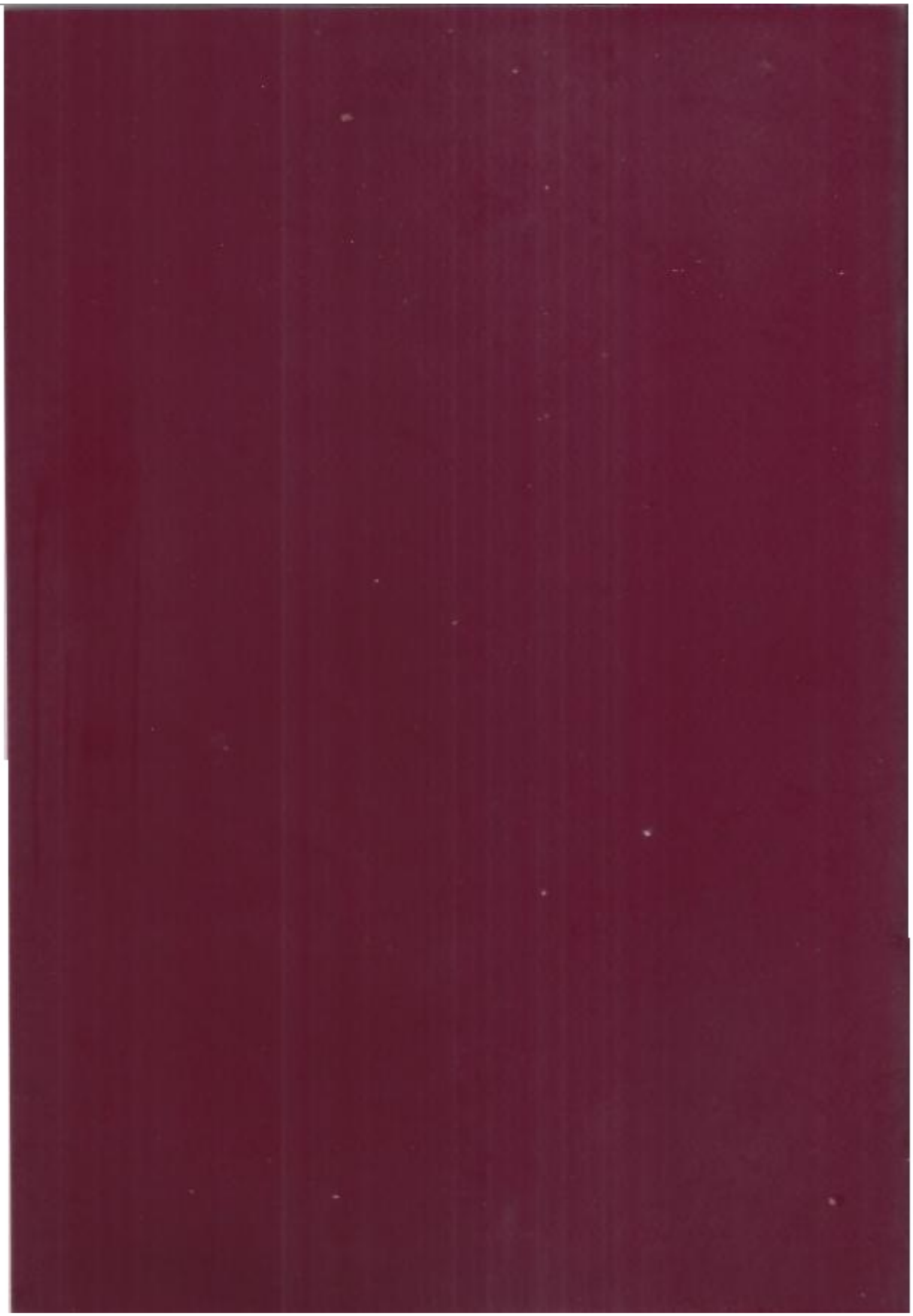
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