SUMMARY

Establishing two-way communication in conferences is critical to successful parent involvement. Conferences are the most important and consistent communication activity in schools. Nonetheless, parents often do not attend conferences or participate actively, and both parents and teachers face them with a mixture of dread and hope.

This chapter has explained what parents, teachers, and administrators can do to prepare for and participate in two-way conferences. The basic ingredients of key communication skills were also discussed, including listening, giving and receiving negative information, and conflict resolution.

Some attention was devoted to IEP conferences, since these are even more difficult to manage than the parent–teacher conference in terms of complexity of content and numbers of players. Finally, the school's role in de-labeling and reaching out to "hard to reach" and "over-involved" parents was discussed.

CHAPTER 7

Enhancing Children's Learning at Home and School

The primary purpose of a partnership between home and school is to support and enhance children's learning. Ideally a child should know that his or her parents or guardian and the teacher are on the "same side," as reflected in continuity of expectations, frequent exchange of information, and explicit mutual support. Moreover, children's learning is enhanced if parents and teachers use an array of complementary strategies to contribute to their learning and development. In this chapter, I will explore two major avenues for home–school collaboration to support children's learning: parent involvement in children's learning at school, and creating a culture at home that supports school success.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING AT SCHOOL

The literature on parent involvement and children's school achievement that was reviewed in Chapter 1 made it clear that parent involvement in school activities increased student achievement as long as that involvement was comprehensive, long-lasting, and well planned. Schools with higher levels of parent involvement had higher student achievement profiles even in low-income areas. The type of involvement was not a critical variable. Apparently, however, parent involvement does not always need to be comprehensive to contribute to the achievement of individual students. For example, a survey of 7,836 students and their parents and teachers at six San Francisco Bay Area high schools indicated that parental attendance at high school events (Open School Night, College Night, athletic events) was related to higher student grades (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). This finding held regardless of parents' level of education or social class. The authors asked parents to help them explain this finding.

> Some parents said their attendance at school events actively demonstrated the values they express verbally to their children. By taking the time and

> trouble to spend an evening at school, they were showing the sincerity of their emphasis on education. Others remarked that they were better able to communicate with their children after having observed some aspects of the world in which their children spend so much of the day. If their children gave distorted reports of events at school, they were better able to support teachers after having gone to the school and judged the situation for themselves. (p. 76)

Although this study does not offer evidence of the generalizability of this relationship in other communities or grade levels, it is suggestive of the potential power of parent behaviors and attitudes to shape youngsters' motivation to succeed in school. While even minimum levels of parent involvement at school may influence children's achievement, some types of parent involvement programs at school are particularly promising because of their ingenuity or potential for supporting increased levels of partnership (and children's learning) over time. In this section, examples are provided of parent activities in school that support children's learning. Though not exhaustive, they illustrate basic principles for activity development and implementation.

Parents as Tutors in School

Parents can be very effective in supporting children's learning at school in the role of tutors, aides, or volunteers. Whether parents help individual or small groups of children with assignments, read aloud to small groups of children, help children to select appropriate literature in the library, or assist in computer-based instruction, tutors extend what schools can accomplish. Children benefit from the increased individualization of instruction; additional resources of knowledge, time, and nurturance; and (as mentioned in Chapter 3), the reduction of dissonance between home and school.

Lightfoot (1978) reported on many benefits of working in the school as seen by a group of mothers working in the Liberty School.

> The mothers reported that many behavioral and learning problems in school seemed to disappear when 1) their child experienced an alliance between mother and teacher; 2) they were able to help teachers become more perceptive and responsive to the needs of their children; 3) their participation in classroom life helped to reduce the workload of teachers; 4) they were able to directly perceive and fully comprehend the complexities and burdensome nature of the teaching role; 5) they could teach some of the teachers, who were not parents, something about nurturance and mothering; 6) they were able to perceive of the school as belonging to them. (pp. 173–174)

My own research at P.S. 111 in New York City confirmed these results (Swap, 1990c). A group of 12 Latino parents who had been active in the school for 2 years as tutors and volunteers had many positive benefits to report. For example, they learned what was expected of their children by the teacher, discovered how they could be really useful at school, connected more easily to teachers who now came to them if they had concerns about their children, became more involved with reading to their children at home, and saw many specific examples of growth in their own children's learning and self-esteem. They also gave several examples of how they contributed to the learning of children who were not their own and how they felt they were contributing to positive changes for the whole school by advocating for additional classroom resources and an after-school program. They explained that they now understood more about how teachers felt when in the classroom. As one mother summarized: "We keep learning with them."

A teacher in the same school provided a complementary perspective of the importance of a family presence in school. She said: "It's the children of parents who are usually around who excel. Teachers are more attentive to their children because parents are keeping a close eye on them." She added that these parents had extended themselves for her and helped her a lot. (For additional information, see Swap, 1990c.)

Including parents in the school as tutors is generally the culmination of a long process of negotiation and building relationships between parents and educators. Particularly when there is dissonance between the cultures of the home and school, teachers fear the disruption that parents might cause, as this teacher from an urban elementary school asserts.

> This sounds terrible, but . . . some parents are low-skilled and illiterate. Such parents would have to be willing to accept correction. Parents should not be permitted to bring their toddlers into the classrooms, and parents would have to refrain from drinking alcohol and smoking if they chose to work in the classroom.

If teachers' and parents' fears of each other can be overcome and a program is initiated, the program must be well coordinated for the tutorial help to be predictable and maximally useful for teachers. A coordinator can identify parent interests and availability, establish

teachers' needs, match teachers and tutors, arrange training (centrally or through individual teachers), and monitor the program. The coordinator may be a teacher or parent (volunteer or paid) or a representative of a larger citywide volunteer association. A procedure for celebrating and publicly acknowledging tutors' contributions is also important. Tutors may be volunteers or paid aides.

When tutorial programs are well coordinated, teachers often feel, as this teacher explained in an interview, that "I don't understand how we ever got along without the parents' help." An unanticipated benefit of parents' involvement in the school is that the experience often leads to new opportunities for parents, such as the pursuit of more advanced education for themselves or being hired in educational roles. (For additional information, see National School Volunteer Program, 1979; South Carolina State Department of Education, 1985; or contact the National Association of Partners in Education in Alexandria, Virginia.)

Parents as Contributors to Curriculum Development

Extensively described in Chapter 3, parent involvement in researching, developing, selecting, or sharing curriculum is a very important way for parents to be involved in enhancing their own children's learning as well as contributing to the pedagogical and social culture of the school.

Parents as Mentors

Schools are increasingly taking advantage of parental experience in professions, hobbies, or avocations to enrich learning opportunities for youngsters throughout the grades. Parents' help may be sought based on educators' awareness of their skills, or all parents or guardians might be asked to fill out a questionnaire describing their expertise, interests, and willingness to participate in school (e.g., amount of time they might contribute; willingness to bring children to their work site; preferences for topic or age group). A brief note to acknowledge parents' willingness to participate is an important trust-building step, even if they are not invited to school immediately.

Armed with this information, school personnel may request that parents be involved (for example) in supervising a youngster's independent project, coming to school to discuss their own careers, or sponsoring a high school youngster in an apprenticeship program.

One interesting variant of the mentor concept was a program developed to extend students' understanding of their local communities in

conjunction with an eighth-grade social studies curriculum. As Freedman, Aschheim, Zerchykov, & Frank (1990) outlined the program:

> Through a "Town Government Program," students get to know how their town works from first hand experience. Parents who work in various offices and on volunteer boards make presentations in classrooms several times each semester. This program is integrated into the children's social studies curriculum and encourages civic responsibility through presenting many options for civic involvement. Participating speakers attempt to give students the total picture of adult citizenship; they indicate that they not only work at a job but also find other ways to contribute to their communities through volunteer positions. (p. 54)

Community mentors also supplement children's learning. For example, P.S. 146 in New York City provides a Models for Success program, where adults from the community or similar neighborhoods who achieved success "against the odds" share information about their own lives (Clinchy, 1992).

Parents' Involvement in Mini-Grant Programs

An innovative idea developed by the Schools Reaching Out project (Krasnow, 1990b) provided an incentive for teachers to experiment with having parents directly involved with students' learning. Through outside funding, mini-grants of $200 per teacher (up to $3,000 each for two schools) were offered to teachers to use in any way they chose as long as parents were included in the plan. More than half the teachers in each school took advantage of the opportunity. Teachers used the funds in varied ways. For example, two teachers used the mini-grants to pay for a field trip. Parents were invited to plan the trip, accompany the class, and follow up with reading and writing projects at home. An art teacher asked parents to join her in helping children do research on the uses of masks in several cultures and then to assist children in producing their own masks at school. Two primary teachers worked together with parents to plan and stock an early learning resource center for children and families.

Teachers, parents, and children evaluated these projects very favorably. For teachers who were not accustomed to parent involvement in school, this format allowed them to simultaneously enrich their curriculum and establish a new level of involvement with parents with which they felt comfortable.

CREATING A CULTURE AT HOME THAT SUPPORTS SCHOOL SUCCESS

Parents today often find it difficult to figure out how to contribute to the development of a healthy, happy, successful child. They are more likely now than in the past to have fewer resources on which to draw in gathering ideas and reassurance about their parenting practices. Parents of young children often live far away from their families of origin; mothers' and fathers' work schedules may make it more difficult to be involved in a peer support network; in many parts of the country there is less of a sense of "neighborhood" than formerly. It may also be hard for parents to try to replicate the strategies that their parents used in raising them, since family circumstances today are very different from even 2 decades ago. Moreover, child development experts in each of the last 3 decades have offered conflicting advice to parents about such topics as setting limits and the best ways of supporting children's learning.

To help fill this vacuum, national, state, and local education and parent organizations and often local schools have created an array of resource materials and parent education opportunities. The resources suggested below are organized into three categories to clarify the different ways that parents can support their child's learning at home. In addition, I discuss special issues for parents of color and ways that parents can offer support to each other.

Meeting Children's Basic Needs

Most parent groups and educational authorities agree that children's learning is supported when parents make sure that children get sufficient rest, are fed an ample and nutritious diet, get to school regularly and on time, are dressed appropriately for the weather, have clean clothes to wear, and have a quiet and well-lit place to work at home.

Single-page handouts are available for parents that make these points. For example, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the Department of Education in Washington, D.C., has a handout available called "Help Your Child Improve in Test-Taking" (no date) that reviews most of these ideas. Local early childhood programs and elementary schools sometimes offer workshops to parents on nutrition, needs of children at different "ages and stages," and how to cope with children's sleeping or eating problems. The goals of these activities are to share information, help parents talk about and work through common problematic issues, and create a useful support network for parents.

When parents do not have the financial resources to purchase appropriate clothes, wash them regularly, or provide their children with nourishing food, schools have options. A school in Philadelphia, for example, has installed a washing machine and dryer. Local merchants donate soap, and others donate clothes for children to wear while their clothes are being cleaned. Some schools organize clothing exchanges, particularly for winter wear. A parent coordinator who is familiar with the local bureaucracy can help parents find housing, restore electricity, or receive stipends for fuel oil.

Identifying Home Activities That Support Children's Learning

There is widespread agreement that parents can support their children's learning by reading aloud, providing an environment that is rich in print materials, talking to their child about events and experiences, encouraging their child's interests, taking the child to interesting places, and exploiting the wide range of ordinarily occurring home and community activities for their learning potential (cooking; fixing things; shopping; participating in family projects, activities, and conversations; watching television; participating in religious communities or organized after-school activities).

Pamphlets. Pamphlets are available for parents from several sources that address these topics. For example, the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement has prepared "Help Your Child Learn to Write Well" and "Help Your Child Become a Good Reader" (no dates); the National Institute of Education has produced "Help Your Child Do Better in School" (no date). The National PTA in Chicago has many publications, including, for example: "Math Matters: Kids Are Counting on You" (no date). These publications provide specific recommendations of things parents can do to extend their children's learning. For example, the PTA's "Math Matters" brochure offers this suggestion among many others: "Using a mileage guide, a map, and a magic marker, let a child follow the route you take, and check how far you have gone. Estimate how much further you must go to your destination or to lunch." Also included are ideas for helping children to recognize shapes and patterns, notice objects that are alike and different, sort objects, and use puzzles and games to support problem solving.

The International Reading Association in Newark, Delaware, has pamphlets available in French, Spanish, and English that focus on such topics as summer reading, using the newspaper (or television) to encourage reading, identifying good books, understanding the relationship

between learning and eating well, and preparing one's child for taking reading tests.

Books and Services from Organizations. Many organizations offer a rich array of materials, books, and services that families can use at home to extend and enrich their children's learning. For example, the Home and School Institute in Washington, D.C., offers such publications as *In Any Language: Parents Are Teachers, Grades 4–6* (1984) and *Survival Guide for Busy Parents: Help Children Do Well at School While You Do Well on the Job* (1987); the National Association of Partners in Education in Alexandria, Virginia, offers a publication entitled *Your Child Can Be a Super Reader*; the National Community Education Association in Alexandria, Virginia, offers a workshop package on home–school partnership that can be provided on site.

Private publishers also offer many resources to parents. *MegaSkills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond* (Rich, 1988) has been widely used, perhaps because it is organized according to skills required for achievement in school (e.g., motivation, perseverance, confidence, teamwork) and provides inexpensive and easy to follow suggestions of activities to do at home that support the development of these skills. College Board Publications offers a book titled *Getting into the Equation* (no date) that focuses on parents' role in helping children to develop math skills through high school, and *Parents as Tutors: Minimizing the Homework Hassle* (Vogler & Hutchins, 1988) emphasizes understanding children's approaches to learning and studying as a vehicle for improving achievement. For an excellent summary of national resources (drawn upon in this section), see *Parents-as-Teachers: A Statewide and National Resource Guide*, available from the Massachusetts Department of Education (1990).

Workshops and Seminars at School. As I will explain in Chapter 8, schools often offer workshops for parents to provide them with specific information about how to support their child's learning through toys, television, discussions, and activities (e.g., "Make and Take" workshops; "Helping Your Child with Homework"; "Math Activities to Do with Your Child at Home"; "Love and Discipline").

Schools may also sponsor workshops that encompass several sessions to give family members a range of ideas about how to increase their children's reading or mathematics proficiency. A side benefit of these multiple-session activities is often to extend or resurrect parents' own skills in these areas. Examples of developed programs that include information and resources for workshop leaders as well as materials for parents include *Family Math* (Lawrence Hall of Science, 1979), *Parents as Partners in Reading* (Edwards, 1990), and *Family Reading* (Goldsmith & Handel, 1990). The San Diego City Schools have developed and piloted a Hispanic Parent Literature Program that brings Hispanic parents together once a month to discuss parenting skills. They learn read-aloud strategies, discover how to ask children probing questions about the literature they are reading, and share stories and poems written by their children and themselves.

Reading at Home. Most educators are convinced of the importance of family involvement in children's reading at home. Whether children read to their parents, siblings read to each other, or parents or guardians read to children, there is good evidence that this effort improves children's motivation to read and reading skill (see Epstein, 1991a; Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982). Therefore, schools often sponsor read-aloud programs, home reading programs, or book-reading contests to encourage children's outside reading.

One urban school (the Ellis School in Roxbury, Massachusetts) developed a "Raise-A-Reader" Program for the early elementary grades (Krasnow, 1990b). Extra books were purchased for children to take home (with special emphasis on high quality literature that focused on African-American and Latino cultures). Parents helped to sew bright red bags for the books, and a "library card" system was established in each classroom. In one class, students could also borrow stuffed animals that were coordinated with the book content (e.g., a long stuffed caterpillar went home with the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* [Carle, 1970/1989]). This simple program sparked extensive outside reading and much enjoyment among the children and adult family members. At the Columbia Park and Berkshire Schools in Prince George's County, children get a smiling face token for each outside book read. Each child's record of accomplishment is displayed by classroom on a huge chart that decorates the first-floor school corridors.

Cutright's (1989) book *The National PTA Talks to Parents* is another interesting resource. She lists pages of interesting projects and activities adopted by PTAs across the nation to support children's learning. For example:

> The Neptune Beach Elementary PTA in Jacksonville, Florida, created a program called "Reading: The Road to Success." It turned the school hallways into roadways, with "fuel pumps" recording the number of pages the students read. School librarians became travel agents who "booked" passage

> to faraway lands. Demand for "fuel"—books—jumped 95 percent during the program. (p. 121)

School-Library Collaboration. Many schools also collaborate with their local libraries to develop and print summer reading lists for children and families. Local libraries often offer (or might be willing to offer) storytelling, special programs, and contests and prizes to encourage summer and school-year reading. Because some families are not familiar with the resources of a library, a field trip from school for children and their parents using public transportation can be a helpful activity.

Helping with Homework and Schoolwork

Homework Issues. Parents at all grade levels frequently feel confused about how they can best assist the school and their child with homework. Confusion often crops up around the nature of assignments (what needs to be done, how, and by what date); the role parents should take in helping (organizer, supporter, doer, proofreader, monitor); what to do if nobody in the home understands the assignment; what to do if the child seems to be anxious, slow, sloppy, or resistant to doing homework.

Teachers can help parents a great deal by clarifying their expectations about homework in workshops, in writing, and/or in grade-level meetings. Some schools have developed hotlines or video programs to help parents and students deal with questions about homework assignments (e.g., see Warner, 1991). Teachers can make parents feel more comfortable about communicating their concerns about homework if they specifically invite parents to call (identifying specific convenient times) or write notes (e.g., on a folder of the students' work that is exchanged weekly).

At the middle-school or high-school level, a frequent concern of youngsters (and parents) is lack of coordination among teachers regarding the quality and quantity of work expected. Several systems are experimenting successfully with team or house systems, where an identified group of teachers work with the same children, meet regularly to discuss common issues, and are available to talk with parents at scheduled times. A less comprehensive, but still useful, solution is for PTAs to sponsor grade-level or school-based discussions so that teachers and parents can exchange concerns and solutions about homework.

As mentioned above, some schools offer workshops or seminars for parents that increase their knowledge and experience with particular subjects. One school, for example, (the King School in Cambridge,

Massachusetts) offered parents Saturday morning workshops in algebra so that they could help their children at home.

Coordinated Home-School Activities. Some schools provide parents with weekly resource materials so that they can understand what the children are learning in school and supplement specific lessons or units with complementary activities at home. Epstein and associates (1992) have developed a program called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) that helps teachers to use or adapt materials for home learning in the areas of math, science, social studies, and art. Collins, Moles, and Cross (1982) review several programs that extend parents' partnership with teachers in supporting children's learning at home. For example, the Parent Partnership program in Philadelphia provides reading and mathematics booklets to parents as well as a Dial-A-Teacher-Assistance project for help with homework in all basic subjects. The San Diego Unified School District offers materials in English and Spanish that cover homework assignments in reading and mathematics through grade 6. Many special education programs involve parents in supplementing or extending their children's learning at home (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). The Office of Research in OERI has commissioned a set of workshops for urban educators called *Schools and Families Together: Helping Children Learn More at Home* (1992) to help educators assist parents to strengthen home learning activities (K–6).

Special Issues for Parents of Color

Parents of color, especially if they are poor, often face special challenges in preparing their children to succeed in school. If the culture and values in the home do not replicate the dominant culture in the school, parents face the challenge of trying to educate their children in both the dominant culture and their own. As members of minorities that experience racial discrimination, parents must also work with their children to help them deal with instances of racism and its meaning to them as individuals and as members of a group. As Perry (1992) explains:

> What happens when a child faces overt or covert discrimination in school, by being ignored, rendered invisible, not touched or responded to, given a lower grade, or disproportionately blamed for disruptions? How does the child make meaning of and interpret these events? Is the child being discriminated against because of a personal failing? Is the problem located in the child or in the system? And there is the problem of maintaining a

> balance. What happens if the child puts "too much blame" on the system? How does one keep the child working and believing that effort matters, and yet socialize him or her to correctly interpret instances when it doesn't? (pp. 85–86)

Perry (1990) clarifies that African-American children face the complex task of integrating three identities: as a potentially successful member of mainstream society in America; as a member of a distinct cultural/racial group; and as a member of an oppressed group. Parents of these children then must address the challenge of helping them to negotiate and make sense of these identities.

As Perry (1990) explains, parents must first build children's knowledge of the strengths and contributions of their own culture and help them to identify with and feel proud of their heritage. Second, parents must help children to understand and experience the norms, values, manners, history, and expectations of the culture that is dominant at the school, so that the children can be seen as having the behaviors and attitudes that make them perceived as being "ready to learn." Third, parents have to help their children recognize instances of racism and learn skills of processing and reacting to these incidents so as to allow them to maintain their equilibrium, self-esteem, pride in their heritage, and belief in the possibility of their own success in the mainstream. Benjamin (1992) maintains that "it is sometimes cumbersome to impart this dual message of survival" (p. 164). She quotes from an African-American mother whose teen-ager attends school in a white neighborhood and who is engaged in a struggle to go along (survive), achieve, and maintain self-esteem:

> I am seeing my child as not willing to be accepting of what you have to do to survive. My child is unwilling to bite his tongue, and it is unfortunate that he has to do it. I tell him in the real world, it is a game, and you have to learn how to play. It goes against my grain, and it annoys me that I have to talk like this, but in reality it is true. I would not be a good parent if I didn't tell my son those people he will be dealing with see him as Black first, and I don't want my son to go out there and think he will be equal to them from their perspective. I want him to feel he is better than the element he is dealing with, but he is not a free spirit in America. He should work toward that, but in the interim, he has to survive and learn how to deal with them, but not give up everything. (p. 164)

Cultural and racial differences help to shape the skills and values youngsters bring to the classroom. Recent ethnographic and cross-cultural studies have helped us to understand some of these differences and their implications for classroom learning. For example, McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, and Benally (1991) describe the Navaho view of knowledge not as a linear hierarchy or a set of isolated skills, but as "a spiraling body of integrated concepts, ideas, and information which support and reinforce each other, continuously expanding to higher levels of complexity and abstractness" (p. 51). In Navaho culture, knowledge is meant to be shared for the common good; moreover, it cannot be given to another or passively received. Each of these assumptions about knowledge influences how Navaho children learn best in the classroom. According to McCarty and colleagues, these youngsters excel in a classroom environment that encourages them to test their hypotheses in an active and interactive learning process and builds on familiar cultural-linguistic content.

Japanese parents have learning priorities which contrast to some degree with mainstream American expectations according to Hess and Azuma (1991). These authors explain that while Japanese parents stress skills that promote cooperation and compliance with authority in their youngsters, American mothers stress initiative and assertiveness. In addition, "Japanese children are expected to probe an issue thoroughly, rather than to push quickly for a 'correct answer'" which dominates the American response (p. 5). The authors explain that Japanese children are trained to rely on internalized diligence and receptiveness, while American children's motivation is prompted by rewards and the teacher's management of the learning context.

Siu (1992) reports that

> Chinese parents, whether here or abroad, tend to exercise more control over the members [of the family], be more protective of children, emphasize more obedience to the parents, provide a higher portion of enthusiastic, positive feedback when teaching young children, value grades more than general cognitive achievement in children, . . . hold children to higher standards, and believe more in effort and less in innate ability than their American counterparts. (p. 14)

Puerto Rican families share some of these values. Important values in this culture that affect school functioning include primacy of interpersonal relationships, emphasis on obedience and following rules, respect for authority, reciprocity, unity of family, and interdependence (Hidalgo, 1992).

Perry (1992) identifies teacher expectations that may conflict with dispositions of the African-American child. She says that

> For the African American child, the issue is not simply the amount of cultural capital, but also the fluency in those dispositions that allow the child to be

> viewed as teachable, ready to learn: the ability to be reserved, to subordinate emotions and affections to reason, to constrain physical activity, to present a disciplined exterior. What complicates the picture even further is that these modes of behavior all reside in the domain of participation, with the possibility that constraining behavior in these areas could possibly constrain participation and investment in school. (p. 94)

She maintains that

> African American culture is not intrinsically problematic. . . . It is problematic, only because of what it represents to white America, and to the extent that it calls forth in the American mind those images that constrain and limit a teacher's and/or a school's ability to hold high expectations, teach, and assess the African American child as capable and ready to learn. (p. 93)

Indeed, each of the varied dispositions brought by youngsters and their parents to school are valued or problematic only to the extent that they coincide or interfere with teachers' abilities to support and teach. History has shown us that there is considerable variability in the degree to which certain groups are seen as having the potential for high achievement. For example, although Chinese-Americans are generally seen as highly successful in schools today, before the repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1943, one in four Chinese-Americans had no formal education, and only half of those over 25 had received some elementary education (Siu, 1992).

Social scientists have often added to the problems of parents from racial and ethnic minorities by attributing their children's lower school achievement to lesser intelligence (Jensen, 1969), deficient child-rearing practices (e.g., Hess & Shipman, 1965), or lack of motivation to achieve. Lightfoot (1978) summarizes this orientation as it has related to African-American families.

> Social scientists have questioned the goodness and adequacy of black parents and distorted or diminished their educative role. Throughout the research literature black family life is described in contrast or in opposition to the social, intellectual, and motivational demands of the school. The *dissonance* in patterns of interaction, values, structures, manners, and style is the major preoccupation of scholars. Furthermore, the dissonance is thought to reside in the *willful* neglect by black parents of their child's preparation and accommodation to school life. Two themes emerge: one that emphasizes conflict and distrust between black families and schools and another that places the blame for the conflict on the family. (p. 129; emphasis in original)

Placing blame for the school failure of minority children on their families is inappropriate because this

- Ignores the role of the school in failing to support some children's school success
- Ignores the long histories of denial of access to academic schooling and good jobs experienced by caste-like minorities (e.g., see Anderson, 1988; Hidalgo, 1992; Siu, 1992; Swap & Krasnow, 1992)
- Ignores the potency of the community in supporting or undermining school success
- Fails to note the differentiated patterns of success within and across racial minorities (see Clark, 1983; Ogbu, 1983)
- Denies the degree to which the conditions of school success are associated with "whiteness" (Perry, 1992).

Investigators have probed the generalized assumption of parental deficiency in poor families, families of color, and families with limited English skills. Several studies, for example, focusing on patterns of literacy and resources to support children's development of literacy, have concluded that contrary to expectations, actual studies of these families have revealed high levels of literacy skill and literacy use as well as high support for their children's literacy development (Auerbach, 1989; Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Auerbach (1989) insists that instead of blaming children's underachievement on assumptions that these families are "literacy impoverished" (p. 169), we should focus on trying to change the ways that we reach out to these parents. She argues that more useful reaching out would be characterized by developing curriculum that draws from the richness and uniqueness of the community, helping parents to explore their own concerns and advocate for their own expectations by using literacy to address family and community problems, and freeing parents to become more involved with their own and their children's literacy development.

How can educators and families work together to support the achievement of children of color? As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, one strategy is to offer activities for parents that make the school's expectations and requirements for success explicit and provide clear guidelines for parents in supporting their children's success within the "mainstream." Another strategy is for schools to use the parents as a resource in developing curriculum that integrates multicultural perspectives into their classrooms and the culture of the school. Bringing multiple cultures into the mainstream by incorporating students' literatures, history, art, and cultural sites into the curriculum of the school fosters continuity

between home and school for more of the children and enriches the curriculum for all. However, as the studies referenced in this section explain, students' values, attitudes toward schooling, approaches to learning and teaching, and explanations for success and failure may also have historical and current roots in their cultures. Moreover, these cultural differences are difficult to articulate and are often misunderstood or seen as indicators of pupil or family deficiency. The solution is to work to create schools that are authentically multicultural in their recognition and celebration of cultural differences and contributions among students, faculty, and families.

Thus, a third strategy, represented in the Partnership model, is to include parents and community members in pursuing the goal of helping all children to be successful in school. Educators may need support in discovering the pedagogy that will enable that goal to be reached, in reexamining their own often subconscious beliefs about the characteristics that allow a child to be successful, in learning how to confront racism and discrimination, and in bringing faculty of diverse backgrounds into the fabric of the school.

Parents Helping Each Other

Parents may find it useful to meet with other parents from the school or community to discuss ways of helping their children negotiate their several identities. Bringing children to community institutions that celebrate their particular culture/race and provide access to role models is a strategy for building cultural pride and experience that many parents employ.

In some communities, the instigation or ongoing energy to help parents support their children's learning comes from formal or informal parent organizations. For example, several communities are experimenting with setting up neighborhood study groups, where a group of children gather together to work on homework after school under the supervision of a parent. Because after-school arrangements are so complex for many working parents, some parents have also gotten together to arrange study groups for children in a community setting (agency, library, recreation center, school) where other parents are paid or volunteer to supervise.

Parents of color at the King School in Cambridge organized an "Honors-Bound" group for parents so that they could meet together regularly and discuss how they could support their children's skills and motivation to succeed. Parents and community leaders in San Diego worked through the churches to sponsor "Education Sundays" to enhance communication between local educators and parents; six-session parent

workshops on ways of supporting children's success at school emerged out of this initial idea. Parents can organize conferences through a school, community agency, or informal support group around topics of concern. Finally, parent organizations at the local, state, and national level can provide resources, linkage, and models that work. For example, the national PTA assembled 23 national organizations to join in a coalition to support family involvement in schools in a conference in April 1992 (Sommerfeld, 1992).

Parents often ask me what they can do if their schools do not support their interest in being involved at school to enhance their children's learning. My recommendation is to ask educators directly what is deterring them from pursuing a more collaborative strategy, and then to try to resolve or answer their concerns.

A second recommendation is for parents to work collaboratively with each other in trying to accomplish a goal. Educators these days are often legitimately concerned about changing policy or practice for a single parent or small group of parents who are advocating a special or unique interest. After all, another small group of parents may be opposed to the change. Thus, several parents who have a common concern or a good idea are more likely to be influential, and their influence will be extended if they have data that indicate that still more parents share their interest or concern.

To illustrate, I visited a school where a group of parents had developed much influence. When I asked them, "What do you do if you really want something to happen?" a parent responded, "If we really want something we scream together. If there is only one mouth, nobody listens. We discuss, problem-solve, talk to the principal, keep after it every day, or nothing will happen. We talk some more, and get five or six parents together to talk to him."

Sometimes educators are reluctant to move away from traditional practice without evidence that a new strategy will be beneficial and successful. Therefore, a third recommendation is for parents who have access to other resources and models to sponsor a workshop that brings in university advocates or practitioners who have been successful in using a Partnership model. Good sources for ideas include the state and National PTA and the community outreach division of the state Department of Education. Alternatively, a team of parents and educators could visit a school whose practices were exciting. Another source of good programs might be a national organization for schools interested in parent and community partnerships called "The League of Schools Reaching Out." A directory of schools and their practices are available from the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning in Boston.

From my perspective, advocating for change within the context of a trusting, mutually beneficial interaction is the best way to effect lasting, collaborative change. So a fourth recommendation is to identify carefully those educators who are willing to experiment, and then to initiate a small-scale activity that is highly likely to be successful. The active demonstration that a different model of home-school relationships can be very beneficial for children and adults in one's own system can be very persuasive to other educators looking on.

Sometimes political action is a fifth alternative. For example, parents can spearhead a change in the membership of the school committee, running and supporting candidates who favor more collaborative policies. Parents can also volunteer for leadership positions in local parent councils or organizations and support the initiation of activities that are more collaborative. In addition, parents involved in the selection of superintendents or principals can argue that candidates should demonstrate a commitment to parent involvement in schools. (Incidentally, these same recommendations are relevant to educators seeking a more collaborative approach with parents who have been deterred by a lack of interest from others in the system.)

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Although not a focus of this chapter, individuals and organizations in the community can also function as important resources for children's learning. Cultural institutions such as museums or theaters, recreation centers, after-school programs, and enrichment programs can add important dimensions to youngsters' intellectual, social, and physical growth. Summer programs for recreation, acceleration, or leadership development may enrich children's lives.

Volunteers from businesses, local colleges, or secondary schools can participate in school-based tutoring programs. A recent interview on NPR's "Talk of the Nation" indicated that there are now 140,000 school-business partnerships in the country. In addition to volunteers, businesses may also supply equipment, scholarships for special programs, supplementary funding, contest prizes, technical expertise, management training, or sites for display of children's work. Increasingly, businesses are interested in sponsoring innovative approaches to schooling, where they function as partners with educators and parents in designing new structures for adults' and youngsters' learning. Big Sister/Big Brother or other mentor programs in and out of school can provide role models and individually tailored activities for youngsters. Clergy may offer pastoral

counseling, meeting sites, and leadership in developing programs for parents or staff. Job training or exposure to a variety of career options may be offered by business or city/district departments.

Sometimes support for children's learning is indirect. For example, coordinated, accessible, and affordable health and human service programs may provide the underpinnings that make learning possible for a child. The expansion of neighborhood and family networks may also be related to parent empowerment and children's growth (e.g., see Cochran, 1987).

Although clearly not a comprehensive list, these suggestions may be a starting point for brainstorming how the community can join with families and schools in supporting children's learning. In Chapter 8, we will return to the theme of community involvement.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have reviewed a range of ways that parents and educators can support children's learning at home and in school. A partnership between home and school is an optimal way to enhance children's learning. Not only does the lack of dissonance between home and school increase children's motivation to learn, but parent involvement in the school as tutors, volunteers, curriculum developers, and mentors extends and enriches what the school can accomplish. Moreover, the school's assistance in clarifying how parents can help at home and in offering useful resources and workshops to families also supports student achievement.

The chapter suggested resources and ideas that would support parents in meeting children's basic needs, identifying activities at home that would support children's learning, and helping with homework and schoolwork.

Parents of color confront particular challenges in preparing their children to be successful in school. Not only do they need to prepare their children to be successfully bicultural, but they also need to help children learn to negotiate instances of racism without losing motivation or self-esteem.

The increasing diversity of our population makes it very important for educators to examine their assumptions about minority families, to integrate the rich perspectives of different racial and ethnic groups into the school's culture and curriculum, and to be responsive to the complexity of parents' roles.

Parents can be an important resource for each other. Local, state, and national organizations offer experienced consultants, good ideas, and

many materials that can be used by parents to gather information and explore programs that are working elsewhere. Parent–teacher organizations based in schools can provide a bridge to these resources. When schools are not eager to welcome parents as partners, coordinated action by parents may be an important option.

Finally, we looked briefly at the essential contributions of the community in supporting children's learning.

CHAPTER 8

Providing Mutual Support

It is not a unique idea that parents and school personnel should support each other in enhancing children's growth and learning, but it is often not clear what this means in practice. In the most general sense, all of the outreach to parents from schools that I have described thus far offers support to parents in guiding their children's learning. Conversely, the involvement of parents in their children's growth and learning at home and in school is supportive of educators' work to enhance children's learning. Thus, to avoid repetition and narrow the discussion in this chapter, I will emphasize only some of the ways in which parents and schools provide mutual support. The focus will be on those aspects of mutual support that highlight differences among the goals and assumptions of the four models of parent involvement and therefore generate controversy.

Specifically, in describing school support for families, I will concentrate on the school's role in providing education and support to parents and guardians that need *not* yield immediate or direct benefits to children. In describing family support to schools, I will provide a range of examples, including some forms of support that are controversial, such as families as advocates and decision makers.

Finally, I will discuss the importance of including the community as a third component of this collaboration. Families and schools are embedded in their communities. Businesses, cultural institutions, and health and human service agencies can both contribute vital support to parents and schools and be recipients of critical support from them. Yet how schools relate to the community and its resources is also controversial, with some arguing that the school should becomes a nexus of institutions in the community and a broker of multiple services to children and families, and some arguing that the schools should not and cannot take on any further responsibilities. The goal of this chapter is not to resolve these debates but to place them in the context of different models of parent involvement.