

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FACILITATES PARTNERING WITH PARENTS: PERCEPTION OF SUPERVISORS AND TEACHERS AT PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVELS

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©Ontario International Development Agency ISSN: 1923-6654 (print)
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Abstract: Multiple benefits have been documented, when parents are actively involved in their children's education. Dearth of research on the nature and extent of home-school partnership at the preschool and primary school levels in the Indian context served as an impetus for the current research. Communication with parents refers to the basic obligations of schools to improve the communications from school to home and from home to school about school programs and students' progress, including the use of letters, memos, report cards, newsletters, conferences, and other mechanisms. Activities and ideas include conducting an orientation/ giving information to parents of children who have just joined the school, helping and encouraging parents to give information to the school and obtain information from the school, developing communication with those parents who are educated in a Non-English medium and do not understand English or who are illiterate/not educated, conducting teacher education programmes to facilitate communication with those parents who are illiterate/educated in a non-English medium, sending the child's work (class work/homework) to their home, encouraging contacts between parents and school when concerns arise, providing training sessions/input sessions for parents and teachers that focus on the importance of home-school partnership, using technology to foster communication with parents and producing a school newsletter. Observation of several experts indicates that the level of communication, in the urban Indian context, is minimal. The objective of the study was to ascertain the perception of supervisors and teachers regarding communicating aspects essential for promoting optimal home-school partnership at the preschool and primary school levels in Mumbai. The sample consisted of 80 participants (20 supervisors and 60 teachers) from 10 schools located in Mumbai. An interview schedule (using open-ended items) was

employed to elicit the desired information. Results revealed that, A substantial majority of the supervisors and teachers stated that their school conducted an orientation program for parents of children who were new entrants (supervisors [85%]; teachers [80%]), particularly developed communication with those parents who were educated in a non-English medium of instruction/illiterate (supervisors [90%]; teachers [86.7%]) and encouraged contacts between parents and the school staff when concerns arose (supervisors [100%]; teachers [95%]). While more (supervisors [70%]; teachers [58%]) acknowledged that their school used technology to improve communication, only a moderate number (supervisors [55%]; teachers [46.7%]) indicated that their school produced a newsletter. Fathers were perceived to be involved in the "communicating" level of home-school partnership, to either a moderate or small extent, but mothers were viewed as being involved to either a large or a moderate extent. Parents and PTA representatives assigned a moderate rating to the "communicating" level of home-school partnership [parents ($M=12.70$; $SD=4.63$); PTA representatives ($M=14.40$; $SD=3.85$)]. The following areas focusing on the communicating level of home-school partnership have been highlighted: a) arranging for an orientation session / program for parents; b) developing communication with those parents who speak little or no English / educated in non-English medium/ lack literacy skills; c) encouraging contacts between parents and school staff in general and when concerns arise; d) using technology to foster, increase or improve communication with parents; e) producing the school newsletter to foster, increase or improve communication with parents; f) providing input sessions for teachers and parents on effective two-way communication techniques and the importance of home-school partnership. Home and

school are the two settings where children spend the majority of their time. When the links are supportive between home and school settings, the more potential there is for healthy development. Home-school partnership is defined as the participation of parents in every facet of their child's education and development from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in the lives of their children. Home-school partnership is the support and participation of parents at home, in the community and at the school site, which directly and positively affects the educational performance of all children. Sheldon (2002) loosely defined parent involvement as the investment of resources in children by parents. Coleman and Churchill (1997) provide a more descriptive definition stating that family involvement can include many different components including a program providing parents with emotional support, providing parents with skills and knowledge and communicating to them about the child.

Keywords: Communicating, Early Childhood Education, Home-School Partnership, Parent Involvement, Preschool and Primary School.

INTRODUCTION

Home and school are the two settings where children spend the majority of their time. Research strongly indicates that home-school partnership is valuable for students, parents, teachers and the school at large. Home-school partnership has a beneficial effect on student learning, student achievement, attitudes, homework and aspirations (Maccoby, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; The National Education Association of the USA, 1997). Benefits to families include better connection between parents, children and communities and an increase in support and services to families; (Epstein, 1995; Comer & Hanes, 1991, & Onikama, Hammond & Koki, 1998). Better teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents, better reputation of schools within the community and better performance of school programmes are some of the advantages accruing to schools (Harris & Wimer, 2004). Home-school partnership has been defined as the participation of parents in every facet of their child's education and development, from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in the lives of their children. (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002).

Given the dynamic and interactive relationship between children and their parents, it is important to highlight and understand the benefits of home-school partnership for the parent. Research has indicated that such benefits include increased understanding of the school (Caplan, 2000; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001) increased interaction

between parents and their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992); more positive parenting styles (Proise, 1990; Hornby, 2000); increased access to needed services, such as health and social services (Wynn, Meyer & Richards-Schuster, 2000); increased levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Burrow, 1987; Batey, 1996; Davies, 1989; Sutherland, 1991; Griffith, 1998; Hornby, 2000) and advancement of one's education (Hornby, 2000)

With respect to the Indian context, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in India was established fairly recently (1955), in comparison with its counterpart in the USA, which was founded in 1897. The role of home-school partnership and parents, as partners in education, was documented formally in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The pioneers of the movement were Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak, Maria Montessori and several others. The writings of great Indian educational thinkers, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore have also drawn attention to parent participation in the child's education as an important aspect in the formative years of a child's life (<http://ncert.nic.in/sites/publication/schoolcurriculum/Education.pdf>)

There are several models that attempt to formalize home-school partnership, such as (a) Gordon's Systems approach (1979); b) Petit Model (1980); c) Berger's Role Categories (1982); d) Chrispeel's Approach (1987); e) Honig's Early Childhood Education Model (1990); f) Jones' levels of Parent Involvement Approach (1989); g) Reggio Emilia model (1990) and h) Epstein's Typologies (2001) (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement.home>)

Joyce Epstein's (2001) typology model is very comprehensive and her guidelines offer an extensive parent involvement programme. There are six levels of home-school partnership, as proposed by her, namely a) parenting (helping families with child-rearing and parenting skills); b) communicating (developing effective home-school communication); c) volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school); d) learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula); e) decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils and committees) and f) collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community) (<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm>)

Communication with parents refers to the basic obligations of schools to improve the

communications from school to home and from home to school about school programs and students' progress, including the use of letters, memos, report cards, newsletters, conferences, and other mechanisms. Activities and ideas include conducting an orientation/ giving information to parents of children who have just joined the school, helping and encouraging parents to give information to the school and obtain information from the school, developing communication with those parents who are educated in a Non-English medium and do not understand English or who are illiterate/not educated, conducting teacher education programmes to facilitate communication with those parents who are illiterate/educated in a non-English medium, sending the child's work (class work/homework) to their home, encouraging contacts between parents and school when concerns arise, providing training sessions/input sessions for parents and teachers that focus on the importance of home-school partnership, using technology to foster communication with parents and producing a school newsletter. Varied strategies have been designed that focus on the ongoing communication between the school and families. They include, a) written communication, such as a welcome letter, school calendar/ diary; b) personal contact, such as parent teacher meetings, open house, home visits; c) ongoing communication, such as newsletters, homework and home learning, parent training programmes; d) special practices and programmes, such as parent resource centers, fun gatherings or annual day (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachFam/perscon.html>).

Research has focused on home-school partnership as a function of specific factors. Fantuzzo, Tighe and Childs (2000) have indicated that mothers were more involved than fathers in home-school partnership. Abramovitch (1993), in Lamb, Nord, Brimhall and West (1997) found that parents from lower socio economic backgrounds were less involved in their child's education. Involvement of parents in the school was found to decrease as the child moved up the educational ladder (Lusthaus & Hollifield, 1994; Abramovitch, 1993, in Lamb, Brimhall & West 1997). Parent perceptions of teachers' attitudes and practices were also shown to be more influential on home-school partnership than background variables, such as race, marital or work status (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986).

For any home-school partnership programme to be effective, assessment in terms of accomplishment of goals is very relevant. Assessment also helps in understanding barriers to home-school partnership and in bridging the same. There are a number of ways in which parents and schools are perceived to place barriers in each other's path, thus discouraging each other from greater involvement. The barriers

identified by the various researchers seem to fall into two broad categories, a) parents being perceived as a barrier source, such as, inadequate language skills, negative attitude towards the teachers, work interference, lack of knowledge of the school system, lack of child-care arrangements, remote location from the school (<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu.htm>); b) school being perceived as a barrier source, such as the lack of a welcoming atmosphere, failure to convince / inform parents of how they can volunteer, lack of opportunities for low levels of commitment, lack of provision of child-care facilities, inadequate public parking / transportation, lack of flexible timings (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999; Floyd, 1998; Hampton, Mumford & Bond, 1998; Moles, 1993; Sosa, 1997). In order to enhance home-school partnership, ways and means have to be identified to overcome the barriers to home-school partnership.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The benefits of home-school partnership have been documented by a number of researchers. When parents are involved in education, there are significant benefits for students, educators, and families. Students demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school and learning, higher achievement and test scores, improved behaviour, increased homework completion, greater participation in academic activities, improved school attendance, and fewer placements in special education. School personnel report greater job satisfaction, higher evaluation ratings from parents and administrators, and more positive associations with families. Parents experience enhanced self-efficacy, better understanding and more positive experiences with educators and schools, improved communication with their children, and better appreciation for their role in their children's education. These positive outcomes have been documented across families from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Also in today's world, people are more keenly aware of their rights and hence involving parents in what matters to them the most, namely their children, is the need of the hour. Again faced with the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population, educators are looking beyond the school walls toward families and communities as resources for fostering academic success for all (Mulhern, Brown, Shanahan, 1994). Currently, with the stress and strain of academic competition, home-school partnership takes on an even more important note. With this in mind, parents need to play a more active role in their children's school life.

Although the benefits of home-school partnership have been spelt out, observation clearly indicates that the level of the same, in the Indian context, is

minimal. Personal communication, with experts / professionals in the field, indicates that there is a dire need to step up and enhance home-school partnership. However, in order to maximize home-school partnership, one needs to understand its baseline level. There is a dearth of research in the Indian context regarding the same. Hence, one aim of the study was to assess the nature and extent of home-school partnership in the level of communicating. The current study attempted to understand the perception of supervisors / coordinators, teachers need, importance, nature, extent, barriers to and strategies for promoting home-school partnership.

The objective of the study was to ascertain the perception of supervisors and teachers regarding communicating aspects essential for promoting optimal home-school partnership at the preschool and primary school levels in Mumbai

METHODOLOGY

Sample Size

The participants of the study were 80 school staff (20 supervisors and 60 teachers) from preschool and primary school levels from ten schools (seven affiliated to the SSC Board, three to the ICSE Board of Education) located in Mumbai. Of the total sample of 20 Supervisors, 10 belonged to the preschool level and 10, to the primary school level. Of the total sample of 60 teachers, 30 belonged to the preschool level and 30 to the primary school level.

Sampling Techniques

The schools, whose Principals gave permission to source the participants, were selected for the study. The sampling technique employed for supervisors and teachers was that of "reliance on available subjects".

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting supervisors were: a) those designated as "The Supervisor" of the preschool/primary school level in that school; b) a minimum qualification of a Higher Secondary Certificate with a degree/diploma in Early Childhood Education/ Education; c) in-charge of the administration, at either the preschool or primary school level of that school for a minimum period of three years. Those supervisors who were supervising both the preschool and primary school levels were excluded. The inclusion criteria for selecting teachers were a) those designated as the "class teacher" of the Sr.KG/ 3rd standard; b) a minimum qualification of Higher Secondary Certificate with a degree/diploma in Early Childhood Education/ Education; c) a minimum of three years of experience in teaching preschool/primary school children.

Sample Characteristics

All 20 supervisors were females. Their ages ranged from 30 to 57 years ($M=46.50$; $SD=7.79$). In addition to having the minimum educational requirement, five primary school supervisors had a Bachelors degree and four had a Masters degree. Their administrative experience ranged from 5 to 19 years ($M=9.85$; $SD=4.63$). All the teachers were females. The ages of the teachers ranged from 29 to 57 years ($M=39.97$; $SD=7.82$). In addition to the minimum educational qualification, some (37) were graduates. The teaching experience of the 60 teachers ranged from 6 to 31 years ($M=12.28$; $SD=5.13$).

Tool, Method and Procedure

An interview schedule was employed to elicit the desired information from supervisors and teachers. The tool consisted of open ended questions, some tapping barriers/challenges to home-school partnership and some, suggestions to overcome these challenges. This interview schedule was constructed by the researcher. The face to face interview method was employed so that, probing could be accomplished. Only open-ended questions were included so that in depth information would be obtained. The face to face interview took approximately half an hour with each of the participants.

RESULTS

Conducting an Orientation Programme / Providing Information to Parents of Children who are New Entrants

A substantial majority of the supervisors (85%) and teachers (80%) stated that their school conducted an orientation programme with parents or provided information to parents of children who were new entrants. The timings mentioned by the participants, regarding the conducting of the orientation programme, varied and were as follows: at the beginning of the academic year (supervisors [65%]; teachers [45%]); within the first month after the school had commenced (supervisors [30%]; teachers [31.7%]); at the time when the admission forms were collected for the child (supervisors [35%]; teachers [13%]) and after the child had been admitted, but before the school commenced (supervisors [25%]; teachers [16.7%]). The methods employed by the school, while conducting such an orientation programme/providing information, included holding seminars, talks, lectures, interactive group meetings (supervisors [60%]; teachers [58%]), contacting individual parents personally (supervisors [50%]; teachers [55%]), showing films or video clippings of the school (supervisors [15%]; teachers [20%]), conducting/holding workshops (supervisors [20%]; teachers [5%]).

The content areas handled in the orientation/information session included a) the expectations of the school from parents/family members (supervisors [40%]; teachers [40%]), such as the timing to meet the school authority or child, informing school about the child-related matters in writing (e.g. medical problem) and b) school-related matters/aspects (supervisors [80%]; teachers [80%]). With respect to the latter aspect, available facilities and services (supervisors [70%]; teachers [70%]), school curricular activities (supervisors [70%]; teachers [66.7%]); extra-curricular activities (supervisors [60%]; teachers [65%]); events taking place during the year (supervisors [50%]; teachers [46.7%]), such as funfair, project day, parent's and grandparent's day; achievements of the school (supervisors [40%]; teachers [50%]) and financial accounts and financial needs of the school (supervisors [35%]; teachers [28.3%]) were mentioned by the participants.

Encouraging Parents to Provide Information to the School and Obtain Information from the School

A substantial majority of the supervisors (85%) and teachers (78.3%) stated that their school encouraged parents to have a clear communication with the school, that is, both to provide information to the school and obtain information from the school. The information provided by the parents to the school was that of the health problems of the child (supervisors [85%]; teachers [63.3%]) and feedback about certain curricular and co-curricular activities or aspects (supervisors [70%]; teachers [58.3%]). The information obtained by the parents from the school were homework-related matters (supervisors [75%]; teachers [76.7%]), school-related rules/policies (supervisors [65%]; teachers [56.7%]) and financial assistance provided to students, such as scholarships for needy students (supervisors [40%]; teachers [46.7%]).

The methods employed by the parents to communicate with the school, as stated by the participants, were as follows: making individual personal contacts (supervisors [75%]; teachers [71.7%]), writing letters or notes to the school authorities or teachers (supervisors [70%]; teachers [65%]), making use of a suggestion box kept in the school which was later addressed by the school (supervisors [30%]; teachers [30%]), engaging in telephonic conversations (supervisors [35%]; teachers [15%]) and sending emails (supervisors [10%]; teachers [15%]). Most participants stated that the frequency with which the parents communicated with

the school was as and when needed or required (supervisors [65%]; teachers [33.3%]), while fewer stated that it was half yearly (supervisors [20%]; teachers [10%]). Interestingly, none of the supervisors but one-third of the teachers mentioned that this communication occurred on a quarterly basis.

Making Efforts to Have a Clear Communication with Parents (Providing Information to Parents and Obtaining Information from Parents)

All the supervisors and almost all the teachers (98.3%) stated that their school provided and obtained information from parents. Regarding information provided by the school to the parents, the responses of the participants were classified into four categories, (See Table 1) namely a) academics (supervisors [95%]; teachers [96.7%]), such as syllabus designed by the school, assessment pattern in the form of report card/progress report, teaching methods used by the teacher; b) co-curricular/extra-curricular aspects (supervisors [95%]; teachers [95%]), such as picnics, competitions, fairs and exhibitions; c) school policies/rules and regulations (supervisors [95%]; teachers [91.7%]), such as timings, fees, admission procedures and d) child-related information (supervisors [85%]; teachers [85%]), such as the child's behaviour and academic performance.

Regarding information obtained by the school from the parents, the responses of the participants all related to the child were classified into four categories (Refer to Table 2), namely a) academics (supervisors [75%]; teachers [65%]), namely study habits and learning preferences, b) co-curricular/extra-curricular aspects (supervisors [85%]; teachers [56.7%]), namely talents and interests and c) behaviour and personality (supervisors [90%]; teachers [56.7%]), namely social behaviour and personality patterns.

The methods employed to provide information and obtain information from parents included conducting parent teacher meetings (supervisors [90%]; teachers [95%]), sending letters, notes (in school calendar or diary) notices, brochures, handouts, circulars to parents (supervisors [80%]; teachers [71.7%]), informing parents at the orientation programme (supervisors [15%]; teachers [28.3%]), utilizing a questionnaire or a suggestion box for parents and to give/provide information or clear doubts (supervisors [20%]; teachers [21.7%]), engaging in telephonic conversation (supervisors [20%]; teachers [18.3%]), sending emails and updating websites (supervisors [5%]; teachers [13.3%]).

Table 1: Areas in which the School Provides Information to Parents, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Information provided by the school to the parents | Supervisors <i>f</i> (%) (<i>N</i> =20) | Teachers <i>f</i> (%) (<i>N</i> =60) |
|---|--|---|
| Academics | 19 (95) | 58 (96.7) |
| Syllabus | 18 (90) | 54 (90) |
| Assessment pattern (report card / progress report) | 17 (85) | 47 (78.3) |
| Teaching methods | 17 (85) | 46 (76.7) |
| Home work-related information | 16 (80) | 47 (78.3) |
| Examination pattern | 12 (60) | 51 (85) |
| Co Curricular / Extra curricular aspects | 19 (95) | 57 (95) |
| Picnics | 17 (85) | 50 (83.3) |
| Competitions | 15 (75) | 52 (86.7) |
| Fairs and exhibitions | 15 (75) | 43 (71.7) |
| Educational tours / trips | 15 (75) | 43 (71.7) |
| Visits | 16 (80) | 39 (65) |
| Camps | 14 (70) | 39 (65) |
| School policies / rules and regulations | 19 (95) | 55 (91.7) |
| Timings | 19 (95) | 44 (73.3) |
| Admission procedures | 18 (90) | 47 (78.3) |
| Fees | 18 (90) | 42 (70) |
| Changes in structure, functioning and facilities of the school | 14 (70) | 37 (61.7) |
| New rules / policies at the government level | 13 (65) | 32 (53.3) |
| Scholarships | 13 (65) | 31 (51.7) |
| Child-related aspects | 17 (85) | 51 (85) |
| Behaviour {positive as well as areas needed to improve} | 17 (85) | 47 (78.3) |
| Academic performance (e.g. child's strengths, weakness and learning preferences) | 16 (80) | 44 (73.3) |
| Participation in extra curricular activities | 14 (70) | 40 (66.7) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

Table 2: Areas in which the School Obtains Information from Parents, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Information obtained by the school from the parents | Supervisors <i>f</i> (%) (<i>N</i> =20) | Teachers <i>f</i> (%) (<i>N</i> =60) |
|---|--|---|
| Academics | 15(75) | 39 (65) |
| Study habits | 15 (75) | 38 (63.3) |
| Learning preferences | 13 (65) | 25 (41.7) |
| Co-curricular / Extra curricular | 17 (85) | 34 (56.7) |
| Talents | 17 (85) | 37 (61.7) |
| Interests | 16 (80) | 35 (58.3) |
| Behaviour and Personality | 18 (90) | 34 (56.7) |
| Social behaviour | 18 (90) | 34 (56.7) |
| Personality patterns | 16 (80) | 27 (45) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

More indicated that this information was provided as and when needed or required, (supervisors [60%]; teachers [56.7%]) less, that it was quarterly (supervisors [20%]; teachers [20%]) while very few, that it was, half yearly (supervisors [10%]; teachers [13.3%]). One supervisor and five teachers mentioned that it was provided weekly or annually.

Developing Communication with those Parents who were Educated in a Non-English Medium (e.g. Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi etc) or did not Understand English

A substantial majority of the supervisors (90%) and a large majority of the teachers (86.7%) mentioned that their school developed communication with those parents who were educated in a non-English medium. The responses of the participants revealed that a range of methods or strategies was employed by the school while communicating with such parents, namely providing an oral translation in a language understandable to the parents at meetings conducted in English (supervisors [90%]; teachers [86.7%]), conducting a parent education programme in a familiar language (supervisors [20%]; teachers [1.7%]), communicating in writing {newsletters/hand-outs/brochures} in the parents' language of fluency (supervisors [10%]; teachers [0%]), providing information through pictures instead of words (supervisors [0%]; teachers [1.7%]). More indicated that the school developed communication with these parents, as and when needed or required (supervisors [45%]; teachers [85%]), while few of the supervisors stated that their school did so quarterly (20%).

Developing Communication with Those Parents Who Were Illiterate

A large majority of the supervisors (85%) and teachers (80%) indicated that their school developed communication with those parents who were illiterate. Providing an oral translation in a language understandable to the parents at the meetings conducted in English (supervisors [85%]; teachers [76.7%]), conducting a parent education programmes in a language familiar (supervisors [25%]; teachers [8.3%]), such as Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi and giving information to parents through pictures, instead of using words (supervisors [5%]; teachers [1.7%]) were the methods employed by the school to develop communication with such parents. More indicated that their school developed communication with such parents as and when needed or required (supervisors [40%]; teachers [80%]), although a few of the supervisors stated that their school did so quarterly (25%).

Conducting an Educational Programme/ Input Sessions for Teachers who communicated with those Parents who were Illiterate

A substantial majority of the supervisors (85%) and teachers (90%) indicated that their school did not conduct a teacher education programme / input sessions for teachers who communicated with such parents. However, two supervisors and three teachers indicated that their school did conduct such training / sessions.

The two specific aspects focused on, in the training sessions, were the need to use simple language while communicating with parents who were not educated (supervisors [10%]; teachers [5%]) and the need to translate information written in English into the languages known to parents, such as Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi (supervisors [5%]; teachers [0%]). Input sessions for the teachers were generally conducted as and when it was needed or required.

Sending the Work of the Students to their Home

All the supervisors and a substantial majority of the teachers (90%) indicated that their school sent the work of the students to their home. As is evident in Table 3, more of the participants stated that homework assignments were sent home, whereas relatively less, that class work was sent home.

A substantial majority stated that worksheets and workbooks and a large majority, that art and craft activities were sent home. Both graded and un-graded works were sent home, according to a majority of the participants. Mixed responses were however obtained with respect to the amount of work sent home, with some stating all aspects, some stating some aspects and some, stating few aspects. More indicated that their school sent the work of the students to their home, weekly (supervisors [65%]; teachers [65%]) and less, that the school did so daily (supervisors [20%]; teachers

Encouraging Contacts between the Parents and School (Teachers, Supervisors, Principals, Others) When Concerns Arose

All the supervisors and almost all the teachers (95%) mentioned that their school encouraged contacts between parents and school (teachers, supervisors, principals, others) when concerns arose. The following are the aspects that the school defined as concerns:

(a) That which could not be handled by the parent or teachers alone (supervisors [90%]; teachers [85%]), such as any disability in the child, due to which the child was not able to perform well or any family

problem which may be causing the child's low performance in school. (b) That which was harmful mentally or physically for the child (supervisors [90%]; teachers [78.3%]), such as school or parents using harsh, physical disciplining methods, such as beating or caning the child, using bad words or verbally abusing the child. (c) That which could give rise to a conflict situation or uncomfortable feelings for the parents or school (supervisors [35%]; teachers [40%]), such as unrealistic demands made by the school, for example demanding a donation or any equipment for the school or by the parents, for example parents demanding that the school provide them with financial accounts.

The participants revealed that the individuals to be contacted when concerns arose depended on the respective concerns. As is evident from Table 4, for most of the concerns, that is academic, co-curricular or extracurricular and behaviour/conduct of the child, a substantial majority of the participants indicated that the teacher was contacted, while for school-related aspects, such as fees and admissions, a large majority indicated that the principal was contacted. A majority of parents were also contacted for academic concerns, such as child's performance in various subjects, completion of class-work/home-work/projects and also co-curricular/extra-curricular concerns, such as lack of participation in activities, not following rules and regulations. The PTA representatives were the least contacted personnel for any of the concerns.

A range of methods were employed by the school for encouraging such contact with the concerned individuals. They were as follows: making individual personal contact and discussing the matter (supervisors [95%]; teachers [88.3%]), sending a note or letter to the individual (supervisors [65%]; teachers [65%]), having a formal meeting/meetings (supervisors [40%]; teachers [46.7%]), engaging in telephonic conversations (supervisors [45%]; teachers [23.3%]) and taking the issue to the committee in the school to solve the problem (supervisors [25%]; teachers [11.7%]).

Providing Input Sessions for Parents and / Teachers that Focused on the Importance of the School and Parents Communicating with Each Other

Almost half the number of supervisors (45%) and a quarter of the number of teachers (23.3%) stated that their school provided input sessions for parents and teachers that focused on the importance of the school and parents communicating with each other. The content areas included in such sessions, as mentioned

by the participants, were as follows: a) enhancing communication between the school and parents (supervisors [35%]; teachers [23.3%]), b) building up the relationship skills of the teachers and the parents (supervisors [30%]; teachers [21.7%]), c) solving problems / conflicts that arose between the school and the parents (supervisors [20%]; teachers [8.3%]).

The individuals who conducted such a programme or sessions, were: a) resource people in relevant fields, namely, Psychology (supervisors [40%]; teachers [23.3%]), Education (supervisors [40%]; teachers [18.3%]) and Human Development (supervisors [20%]; teachers [16.7%]); b) teacher educators with training (supervisors [25%]; teachers [11.7%]), and those without training (supervisors [5%]; teachers [0%]) and c) administrators, such as the principal or supervisor or coordinator with training (supervisors [20%]; teachers [15%]) and those without training (supervisors [5%]; teachers [11.7%]).

A variety of methods and strategies to conduct such a training programmes or sessions for parents and teachers were employed, namely, holding workshops which included skits and role-plays (supervisors [30%]; teachers [16.7%]), sharing of actual experiences of effective communication (supervisors [25%]; teachers [15%]), holding seminars, talks, lectures, interactive sessions or meetings (supervisors [20%]; teachers [13.3%]), showing films, slides and documentaries (supervisors [5%]; teachers [1.7%]). More participants indicated that the duration of such a programme was a half-day (3 hour) session (supervisors [35%]; teachers [13.3%]).

Using Technology to Increase, Improve and Foster Communication with Parents

A majority of the supervisors (70%) and more than half the number of teachers (58%) stated that their school used technology to increase, improve and foster communication with parents. Two purposes for using technology were mentioned by the participants, namely; a) to convey messages or instructions (supervisors [65%]; teachers [58.3%]) and b) to obtain feedback or suggestions regarding the child or the school (supervisors [40%]; teachers [38.3%]).

Different methods of technology were used by the school. As is evident from Table 5, more mentioned the use of the cyclostyling machine and the telephone, fewer, the use of the xerox machine, the computer (hotline or emails) and the overhead projector and very few, the use of a handy-cam and a tape recorder. More indicated that their school used technology to communicate with parents as and when needed or required (supervisors [45%]; teachers [58.3%]).

Table 3: The Kind, Amount, Nature of Student's Work (Class Work / Homework) Sent Home, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Kind, Amount and Nature of Students Work | Supervisors | Teachers |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=20</i>) | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=60</i>) |
| Kind of students work | 18 (90) | 60 (100) |
| Homework | 13 (65) | 54 (90) |
| School/ class work | 10 (50) | 41 (68.3) |
| Activity / subject: | 18 (90) | 60 (100) |
| Worksheet, workbooks | 16 (80) | 55 (91.7) |
| Art and craft activities | 15 (75) | 50 (83.3) |
| Clay modelling | 3 (15) | 21 (35) |
| Poems or essays | 5 (25) | 29 (48.3) |
| Simple science activities/ demonstration (e.g. sowing of seeds, model of planets) | 8 (40) | 33 (55) |
| Class test answer sheets | 4 (20) | 18 (30) |
| Whether students work is evaluated or not | 18 (90) | 57 (95) |
| Child's work that is graded as well as un-graded | 14 (70) | 42 (70) |
| Child's work that is only graded | 3 (15) | 24 (40) |
| Child's work that is not graded | 1 (5) | 6 (10) |
| Amount of students work | 18 (90) | 54 (90) |
| All aspects | 4 (20) | 27 (45) |
| Some aspects | 9 (45) | 15 (25) |
| Few aspects | 5 (25) | 18 (30) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

Table 4: Individuals or Personnel Contacted when Concerns Arose with regard to Various Aspects, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Individuals or Personnel contacted | Supervisors | Teachers |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=20</i>) | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=60</i>) |
| Academic / curricular concerns | 20 (100) | 57 (95) |
| Teachers | 18 (90) | 54 (90) |
| Parents | 15 (75) | 46 (76.7) |
| Supervisor/ principal | 15 (75) | 31 (51.7) |
| Parents Teachers Association/ representatives (PTA) | 1 (5) | 0 (0) |
| Co Curricular / Extra-curricular concerns | 20 (100) | 53 (88.3) |
| Teachers | 18 (90) | 52 (86.7) |
| Parents | 13 (65) | 42 (70) |
| Supervisor/ principal | 9 (45) | 20 (33.3) |
| Parents Teachers Association/ representatives (PTA) | 1 (5) | 7 (11.7) |
| Behaviour/ conduct of the child at school | 19 (95) | 57 (95) |
| Teachers | 18 (90) | 51 (85) |
| Supervisor/ principal | 13 (65) | 38 (63.3) |
| Parents | 15 (34) | 37 (61.7) |
| Parents Teachers Association/ representatives (PTA) | 0 (0) | 4 (6.7) |
| School matters (e.g. fees, admission, rules and regulations) | 18 (90) | 52 (86.7) |
| Supervisor/ principal | 14 (70) | 48 (80) |
| Parents | 9 (45) | 16 (26.7) |
| Teachers | 4 (20) | 13 (21.7) |
| Trustees | 4 (20) | 8 (13.3) |
| Parents Teachers Association (PTA) / representatives | 3 (15) | 2 (3.3) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

Table 5: The Methods / Techniques Employed to Increase, Improve and Foster Communication, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Methods / Techniques | Supervisors | Teachers |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=20</i>) | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=60</i>) |
| Cyclostyling machine to print circulars | 12 (60) | 26 (43.3) |
| Telephone | 11 (55) | 28 (46.7) |
| Xerox machine | 7 (35) | 20 (33.3) |
| Computer: hotline, e-mail, website, | 5 (25) | 17 (28.3) |
| Intercom (announcements over the speakers) | 6 (30) | 12 (20) |
| Over head projector | 4 (20) | 15 (25) |
| Handy camera | 2 (10) | 7 (11.7) |
| Tape-recorder/ voice recorder | 2 (10) | 7 (11.7) |
| Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) | 4 (20) | 1 (1.7) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

Table 6: The Content Areas of the Newsletter Produced by the School, according to Supervisors and Teachers

| Content areas of school newsletter | Supervisors | Teachers |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=20</i>) | <i>f (%)</i> (<i>N=60</i>) |
| Articles | 9 (45) | 17 (28.3) |
| Fostering creativity in children | 8 (40) | 16 (26.7) |
| Enhancing the child's growth and development | 8 (40) | 14 (23.3) |
| Preparing nutritious food for children | 7 (35) | 12 (20) |
| Understanding safety measures and precautions | 7 (35) | 12 (20) |
| Disciplining children | 6 (30) | 11 (18.3) |
| Facilitating the health and wellbeing of children | 6 (30) | 10 (16.7) |
| Achievements / contributions | 11 (55) | 28 (46.7) |
| Childs achievement (e.g. awards or prizes obtained) | 10 (50) | 24 (40) |
| Childs contribution (e.g. art, poems and drawings) | 10 (50) | 21 (35) |
| Teachers achievement or contributions to the school | 10(50) | 18 (30) |
| Parents achievement or contributions to the school | 8 (40) | 11 (18.3) |
| Contribution or list of parent volunteers | 7 (35) | 5(8.3) |
| Financial accounts | 4 (20) | 7 (11.7) |
| Future programmes / meetings to be held | 9 (45) | 22 (36.7) |
| Special events and activities to be held in the school | 9 (45) | 19 (31.7) |
| Parent meetings scheduled | 6 (30) | 11 (18.3) |
| Updated information | 7 (35) | 22 (36.7) |
| Changes or improvements in school activities or physical structure and facilities | 7 (35) | 22 (36.7) |

Note. Multiple responses were obtained

Producing a School Newsletter

A little more than half the number of supervisors (55%) and a little less than half the number of teachers (46.7%) stated that their school produced a school newsletter. The content areas of the school newsletter, as stated by the participants, could be classified into five general categories: (See Table 6) a) articles (supervisors [45%]; teachers [28.3%]); b) achievements and contributions of the students and parents (supervisors [55%]; teachers [46.7%]); c) financial accounts (supervisors [20%]; teachers [11.7%]); d) future programmes and meetings held (supervisors [45%]; teachers [36.7%]) and e) updated information (supervisors [35%]; teachers [36.7%]). The "article" category focused on issues pertaining to the various areas of the child's growth and development, the achievements/contributions of children, parents, parent volunteers and teachers comprised the "achievements/contributions" category. The "future programmes and meetings held" category pertained to the special events and activities to be held in school and the parent meetings scheduled and the "updated information" category included changes or improvements in school activities or physical structure and facilities.

Most of the teachers indicated that the school produced the newsletter annually. With respect to the supervisors, there were mixed responses, with some stating that the newsletter was produced quarterly (25%) and fewer, that it was produced half yearly (10%).

DISCUSSION

Arranging for an Orientation Session / Programme for Parents

Teachers need to orient parents regarding their school's academic and non-academic activities, expectations, rules and regulations in order to send a clear message to children, that both teachers and parents are working together to help them succeed (Drake, 2000; James, Jurich & Estes, 2001). In the present study, all experts were in agreement that an orientation session/programme should be conducted for parents of new entrants and one felt that such an orientation was needed also for parents of children promoted to the next standard. A substantial majority of the participants stated that their school did conduct an orientation programme for parents of children who were new entrants. A parent/family orientation programme provides parents with the tools and information needed to assist in their child's transition to school life and in their academic achievement and overall success (<http://provost.ucsd.edu/.pdf>).

In the current study, supervisors and teachers felt that the content of the orientation programme should include the following information about the school: a) philosophy and goals; b) facilities and services; c) activities and events (academic and extracurricular); d) rules, regulations and expectations of children; e) finance (funding and financial needs); f) teaching methodology; g) importance of home-school partnership. Rewardingly, the participants maintained that in the orientation session conducted for parents, their schools focused on information similar to that indicated by the experts. A few of the participants also felt that the orientation should provide an opportunity to parents to address their doubts, queries and concerns and to communicate what aspects they would like to learn about with respect to the school or from resource people.

Though participants indicated that their school did conduct an orientation program/sessions, the following points could help the school enrich the quality of such sessions. An introductory letter from the school could be sent, a few days prior to the orientation, containing specific information about the date and venue of the orientation. Parents and their children (new entrants) could be provided an opportunity to become acquainted with their school, such that they could spend time in exploring the school environment, such as the classrooms, library and playground level and in meeting the teachers in an informal manner. A teacher could be assigned for this purpose. In addition to becoming familiar with the school environment, the PTA members and other families, new to their school, could be introduced to each other. The orientation programme could be held in English, but an oral translation of the same, in other languages known to parents (e.g. Hindi, Gujrathi and Marathi), could be prepared and presented. All these points would make the orientation programme more meaningful and help parents become active participants in school.

Developing Communication with Those Parents Who Speak Little or No English / Educated in Non-English Medium/ Lack Literacy Skills

Heurta-Macia's (1998) study revealed that parent's felt that no one in the school listened to them when they were unable to communicate in English. Also their feelings of self-worth diminished because they did not understand forms/circulars that were sent home and could not help their child with homework. A lack of literacy skills in ones own native language can create an even greater sense of helplessness and embarrassment. Illiterate parents believe that they cannot offer their child any help, much less help or support their child's teacher

(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HUL/is_1_33/ai_109738570).

In the current study, the supervisors and teachers felt that all parents, regardless of their level of education or facility with the English language, had a right to know what was happening at school and that it was the responsibility of the school to ensure that information reached every parent. Developing communication with illiterate parents or parents who did not speak English was viewed as a sign of respect and a method of fostering better communication with them and eliciting feedback from them. A majority of the participants mentioned that their school developed communication with those parents who spoke little or no English/were educated in non-English medium of instruction/were illiterate. A range of methods or strategies was employed by the school while communicating with such parents, namely providing an oral translation of the parent education programme in the language known to parents and communicating in writing {newsletters/handouts/brochures} in the language understood by the parents and using pictorial communication instead of verbal expressions, whenever relevant.

Two-way communication invites parents and teachers to work as partners because they are able to share reactions, ideas, preferences and questions about needs, expectations, programmes and children's progress (Diss & Buckley, 2005). Other than the methods employed by the schools, special accommodations must be made and strategies practiced to reach those parents / families, whose first language is not English. Ideally, a resource person, perhaps a school staff, should be available to communicate with parents in their first language. Interactive telephone, voice-mail systems that have bilingual recordings for families are also useful. In addition, English classes for parents and grandparents may be helpful. Some more organized strategies for effective communication with parents who speak little or no English, educated in non-English medium or lack literacy skills are proposed in the section on guidelines (Heurta-Macias, 2004).

Encouraging Contacts between Parents and School Staff in General and when Concerns Arise

For many parents, a fundamental part of the parenting role is to be their child's strongest advocate with the teacher and the school. Some parents, however, may be reluctant to express their concerns because of cultural beliefs related to the authoritative position of the teacher. Other parents may have difficulty talking with teachers, as a result of memories of their own childhood school experiences or they may be unsure of how to express their concerns to teachers. (Katz, 2005) A few parents may fear that questioning the

teachers regarding their child's performance will put their child at a disadvantage in school.

Many parents may be surprised to learn that teachers, especially new teachers, are sometimes anxious about encounters with parents. Most teachers have received very little training in fostering parent-teacher relationships, but with the growing understanding of the importance of parent involvement, they may worry about doing everything they can to encourage parents to feel welcome (Greenwood & Hickman, 2001).

In the current study, the supervisors and teachers indicated that the school should encourage contact between parents and the school personnel (teachers, supervisors, principals, administrators, others) when concerns arose. Similarly, substantial majority of the participants stated that their school encouraged contacts between parents and school when concerns arose and that the concerns were addressed. There is evidence to indicate that the best chance for teachers and other school staff to become acquainted with the families of students is through personal contacts (Nielsen & Finkelstein, 2003). In face-to-face contacts, people exchange a wide range of information, present detailed views and concerns as well as make observations of each other and the meeting surroundings (Willis, 2005). Parent liaisons can also help schools respond to the needs and concerns of families (Jones, 2001; Lontos, 2002). It is important to create a climate in which misunderstandings and disagreements between parents and teachers can be minimized through communication. Some general principles for parents and teachers in handling concerns are provided in the section on guidelines.

Using Technology to Foster Increase /Improve Communication with Parents

Technology has the ability to bridge the communication gap between the home and the school. It can provide a wealth of information for parents and school to communicate with each other and enhance home- school partnership (Salend & Duhaney, 2004). It also affords a number of methods (e.g. email, website, phone calls, computer inventories and online surveys) from which one can document involvement.

In the current study, supervisors and teachers maintained that if technology was available with the school or if the school could afford it, then the school should use the same to foster communication with parents. Thus technology was perceived to be desirable, though not mandatory for the school to employ. More of the participants acknowledged that their school used some degree of technology to foster/improve communication. The technology used

in most schools included the telephone, the computer (hotline or emails) and the overhead projector. In some schools, the cyclostyling machine, the xerox machine, the handy-cam and a tape recorder were utilized. Observations indicated that the equipments were in fairly good working condition. Some schools had installed telephone answering systems that permitted the school staff to record announcements during emergencies, such as heavy rains, special holidays, any new event or commencement of a special programme, such as skating cases, language classes and swimming coaching.

In recent years, educators in the U.S.A. have experimented with various technologies to communicate with parents in innovative and time-efficient ways. Integrating technology can help schools communicate quickly to a broad parent community. Classroom phones and voice mail, video technology, announcements on radio transmissions and school websites are all examples. Phones in each classroom permit teachers a flexible opportunity to contact parents from their classrooms when students are not present. Use of the voice mail to augment phone communication has been specifically explored to enhance communication opportunities with parents. In some schools, the recorded message facility provides updates on homework assignments, classroom highlights and also invites parents and children to respond with a message of their own (Ramirez, 2001).

Salend, Duhaney, Anderson and Gottschalk, (2004) have indicated that internet technology is the most recent tool used by schools to communicate to a parent community. Increasingly, school websites are used to convey a broad range of school information. Students often become involved with both the technology and the content of the website and may work together with teachers to create and maintain the site. Teachers trained to use the school website can provide updates easily accessed by parents regarding homework assignments, test schedules, resource links, and so on. In fact, the use of the internet can serve as an "interactive tool for individualizing homework and supporting the involvement of families in the homework process". Technology also holds promise to allow teachers communication opportunities "not limited by school hours or location" (Brewer & Kallick, 1996). Student performances can be videotaped and presented to a larger audience at convenient times. Students may create digital portfolios that can be shared with parents on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, student learning plans may be accessed online, enabling goals and progress to be shared with parents. Indeed, the capacity to link homes and schools with new technologies provides many novel opportunities to

enhance communication with parents beyond the traditional formats (<http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf>).

In India, it is important to emphasize on technology, as it can provide wider access to the parent body and the community at large. Also since schools are in the process of undergoing accreditation, technology can be perceived as an indication of a best practice in the school set-up. The computer, and in particular the e-mail facility can help in improving parent teacher contacts and can be of immense help to working parents who lack the time to make personal contact with the school staff.

Producing the School Newsletter to Foster, Increase or Improve Communication with Parents

The school newsletter can be an effective means of communication amongst parents and with the school and community at large. It also aids in running the institute smoothly and successfully (Tessier, 2002). Paradee and Mellencamp (2004) suggested that the newsletter could contain incidents in schools, academic and non academic activities, experiences shared by parents, students and school personnel, regional language articles, profile of educators and information on events and programmes, such as seminars and conferences. The school newsletter can also be used for providing information about the community and building links among businesses, families and the schools.

Newsletters are useful when careful thought is given to: "Why have a newsletter?" "Who is the audience?" "What do we want to communicate?" "How should we present the information?" They seem to be practical, inexpensive, efficient ways to provide families with timely and valuable parenting and child development information and inform them about school activities and expectations. According to Rimm-Kauffman and Cox (2003), the attractive, easy-to-read, single-sheet format means that parents are more likely to read it and put the tips to good use. This is an easy way for educators, school personnel and researchers to communicate with today's busy parents - at a comparatively low cost and with almost no time or effort (<http://www.rfeonline.com/index.cfm>). There is research to indicate that newsletters have been useful in promoting the self-confidence of parents, improving their knowledge of child development, and increasing their ability to be effective and nurturing parents (<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/detailmini.jsp>). Pianta (1999) and Rimm-Kauffman and Cox (2003), also found that when newsletters are filled with practical ideas, they promote academic

success, foster effective parenting, improve home-school partnership and inculcate healthy habits and positive character traits.

In the present study, all the supervisors and teachers felt that the school should produce a newsletter for a number of reasons, namely that it kept parents updated and provided them with an opportunity to share their thoughts/ideas and also be a part of the compiling and editing committee. Experts maintained that the newsletter should be interesting, meaningful, pertinent, colourful and pictorial and along with English language, Hindi should also be used as a medium of communication, as it was the language understood by a larger number of parents. The content aspects according to them, should include: a) articles for parents that facilitate effective parenting; b) awards, achievements/contributions of children and parents; c) school activities and events. Disappointingly, a moderate number of the participants stated that their school produced a school newsletter, although the content areas of the school newsletter that were provided, as stated by the participants, were similar to those voiced by the experts. Since only a few of the schools were providing a newsletter, there is a need to ascertain the obstacles to the same (e.g. financial constraints, lack of volunteers to help in producing the same, work overload of the teachers) and identify ways and means to overcome the same.

Providing Input Sessions for Teachers and Parents on Effective Two-Way Communication Techniques and the Importance of Home-School Partnership

Teachers may be highly trained and prepared to work with children and types of subject matter, but they are not always prepared to work effectively with parents. Cook, Tessier and Klein (2004) suggested that the schools should encourage or mandate training activities for school authorities and teachers, to help them gain the skills to do a better job involving families. This will ensure that staff is aware of the importance of home-school partnership for student achievement. Katz (2005) felt that a genuine partnership with parents requires a substantial change in teacher attitudes and practices. According to him, an in-service training and support programme should include the development of communication skills (written and verbal) and the two-way method of communication for involving parents in the planning curriculum.

Input sessions are also important for parents as they can create opportunities for them (parents) to air a wide range of issues and concerns, to make social contacts and to listen to invited speakers (Dyson,

2007). In the current study, all experts were of the opinion that there was a dire need for the school staff to be trained regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of a regular two-way communication between the school and the family. However, few of the participants indicated that their school conducted such input sessions for school staff and parents. The barriers that could be faced by the schools in this respect include: inability to recognize the value of such input sessions, difficulty in locating experts/resource persons for holding such sessions, lack of resources, such as a low/poor budget, poor technology and infrastructure in the schools and time constraints. The schools that conducted such input sessions, focused on topics, such as enhancing communication between the school and parents, building up the relationship skills of the teachers and the parents, solving conflicts or problems that arose between the school and the parents and exposing the staff and parents to the philosophy of the school and its vision and mission regarding home-school partnership.

CONCLUSION

Parents are the child's first teachers and invaluable resources. When parents are actively involved in their child's education, children tend to model the attitude and action of their parents. Parents serve as advocates within the school and they duly affect their children's development and school-wide reform. When children go to school, teachers act as substitute parents. In order to achieve maximum effectiveness, parents and teachers together must take centre stage in the child's educational process. A mutual relationship between the school and family must be present in order to focus on the needs of the children (Coleman & Wallinga, 2000). "Parents are critical to children's successes during the school years" (Ballantine, 1999, p 73). If parents do not provide the necessary support and resources that their children need to increase their chances of succeeding in school, their children are placed at increased risk for school failure (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Epstein, 1995).

Home-school partnership / parent involvement in schooling has traditionally taken many forms including parents helping their children with homework, parent-teacher interviews, special consultation on student problems, parent councils, and parent volunteer help in the school and the classroom. Today home-school relationships are changing for a multitude of reasons, including greater diversity of the parent population, changes in family structures, increasing school choice, more parental involvement in the governance of schools, new methods of assessment and reporting, and special education legislation
<http://www.ernape.net/articles/1999/moore99.pdf>

However, despite the value and the apparent increase in the extent of home-school partnership, it (home-school partnership) still remains a problem in schools today. "In fact, minimal home-school partnership/parental involvement in schools is an international phenomenon, with the majority of parents worldwide having little contact with the schools which their children attend" (Epstein, 1990, p 276). Thus formulating new strategies for involving parents in their children's learning is particularly important during this time of profound social change and educational reform, nationally and internationally.

India has made enormous progress in terms of an increase in institutions, teachers and students in elementary education. The number of schools in the country has increased four-fold-from 2, 31,000 in 1950-51 to 9, 30,000 in 1998-99 and enrolment in primary schools has increased about six times from 19.2 million to 110 million. (<http://ifmr.ac.in/pdf/workingpapers/8/microfinance.pdf>). Also today's schooling in India is more or less at par with the United States curriculum. Indeed some schools in India have been found to provide excellent instruction and curriculum. However, the scene with respect to home-school partnership is far from being optimistic, with the level noted to be almost nonexistent. Moreover, even in the case of the children from upper class backgrounds, it is ironically the pressure placed on them by their parents to excel in school, get very good grades and choose a doctor, lawyer or business profession, that is probably one of the few evidences of home-school partnership. Thus there is a call for more positive parental participation in schooling both internationally as well as in India, to reduce the unwanted and harmful distance between parents and the school as well as to launch policy efforts to make this relationship closer" (Carvalho, 2001).

Home-school partnership is the support and participation of parents at home, in the community and at the school site, which directly and positively affects the educational performance of all children. Sheldon (2002) loosely defined parent involvement as the investment of resources in children by parents. Coleman and Churchill (1997) provide a more descriptive definition stating that family involvement can include many different components including a program providing parents with emotional support, providing parents with skills and knowledge and communicating to them about the child.

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