1

The Importance of Educational Partnerships

After reading this chapter, you should have a better understanding of:

- what partnerships are and reasons for promoting them within schools and classrooms;

- the myriad benefits to creating partnerships among schools, businesses, universities, families, and other community groups;

- examples of community, professional, and family partnerships to enhance the education of students;

- how home, school, and community all influence the educational potential and access for students and families;

- the role of *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998) in enhancing and sustaining partnerships;

- the difference between acculturation and assimilation when working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds;

- collaboration models and examples; and

- shared, sequential, and separate responsibilities related to education of children and youth.

| Table 1.1 | Prior Knowledge and Beliefs Organizer |

Describe your experiences with educational partnerships as a child and as an adult.	Describe your feelings related to the partnership, the partners, the learning, and any specific activities that you remember (positive and negative).

Use the information you enter in Table 1.1 to provide a background as you read about the reasons for educational partnerships and examples of different types of partnerships.

Overview of Educational Partnerships

What Is an Educational Partnership?

There are many definitions and ideas that surface when describing a partnership. Formally, a **partnership** is an agreement where two or more people or groups work together toward mutual goals. Partnerships can be formal, informal, or even unspoken as long as they include people or groups working together. Most experts agree that a partnership must benefit both sides for it to be truly effective.

When two parties come together for the common good of a school or to enhance student learning, we call this an **educational partnership**. Partners can include anyone who is interested in or committed to enriching educational experiences for students, families, schools, and the community. Most important, partnerships do not include one individual or one group dictating what should be done and why it should be done. Decisions are made collaboratively within a partnership. Although educational partnerships can be formed between teachers and students, the collaborations discussed in this book will relate mostly to those outside the teacher-student relationships to include entire families, professionals, and the broader educational community. These partnerships always include students but are integrated within larger groups, and organizations can supplement school learning and encourage lifelong learning among children and families. Joyce Epstein (1999) created a Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland in an effort to inform and promote community partnerships to enhance education for students and families. The center has three goals: (a) creating, assessing, and sharing effective partnership strategies; (b) enhancing the education of teachers and teacher education programs to encourage more community involvement; and (c) conducting research on community partnerships and best practices. This book is organized with similar goals in mind. Throughout each chapter, steps for creating and assessing partnerships will be featured in addition to step-by-step examples to help teachers plan, implement, and assess current and future educational partnerships.

Why Take the Time to Establish Partnerships?

The answer to the question above is quite simple: We should establish partnerships to provide the best education possible for all children. In reality, partnerships are created for a variety of reasons that include enhancing public relations, seeking additional funding, and working toward a particular cause or issue. Some partnerships are developed within a formal structure, and others are developed based on an unwritten understanding or handshake. Many school districts include partnerships with students' home and community within their mission statements or educational goals. However, the more difficult challenge is for schools and districts to actually enact those partnerships during the busy school year.

A principal once told me that her teachers were "maxed out" and that they had done everything instructionally to increase students' educational achievement including extra instructional minutes for reading and math. However, their students did not show significant improvements in learning in these areas. She told me that her school

had decided to change its strategies and focus from additional drill and practice time to working with families and the broader community to increase academic achievement. Interestingly enough, after multiple parent sessions and the development of partnership programs, she and her teachers started to observe better academic progress for all students, a higher motivation for learning, and a more positive school atmosphere. The United States has increased spending for elementary and secondary schools, but this extra monetary support has not resulted in significantly higher academic achievement, according to U.S. Department of Education statistics. In addition, spending to assist disadvantaged children grew by 45% between 2001 and 2006, resulting in an achievement gap that continues to exist among various groups of students. When schools choose to enhance partnerships with families, this has unlimited possibilities for improving educational progress for all students. Research studies during the past 25 years all support family and community involvement as a strategy that supports student learning.

One of the reasons for continued inequities and achievement gaps could be based on the fact that there is often a disconnection between parents and teachers. Family-teacher partnerships have been strained at times due to the stress related to standardized testing and negative information highlighted within media sources. *Time* magazine published a series of articles related to teachers and parents at odds with each other (Gibbs, 2005). As a teacher and a parent, I was shocked by the cover headline, "What Teachers Hate About Parents." I believe that parents do not even realize that teachers may actually "hate" them. Couple that view with parents who feel that they are intruding if they question or impede formal schooling and with teachers who think that parents should be doing more, and you definitely have miscommunication between families and schools. And though there are many teachers who work collaboratively with families, there are just as many teachers who do not have the experience, education, or strategies to develop positive reciprocal relationships outside the four walls of the classroom.

Many positive teacher-family relationships do exist; however, many do not exist for a number of reasons. The most common reason includes the diverse cultural beliefs of teachers, students, and families; the lack of time in busy daily schedules; and work obligations. In addition, most families are doing all they can each day to take care of their children and pay bills. Allotting time and effort for creating partnerships with schools is not usually a priority. However, if families and teachers knew of the ultimate benefits that an educational partnership could have on the academic development of children, they would make it more of a priority. Educational partnerships take time and effort to develop, but once they are developed and sustained, the benefits are endless for all groups and individuals.

Who Benefits From Educational Partnerships?

Having partners in education helps provide a more even playing field for all families and children. Society benefits when students, families, the community, schools, and teachers work together to educate children. Lueder (1998) describes specific outcomes and benefits to the school, families, students, teachers, administrators, and the community when they work together as partners. These outcomes areoutlined below.

Parents and teachers worked together to create an "Island-Themed Day." Students danced to a steel drum band and sampled traditional island dishes.

The school benefits by gaining:

1. better communication among all parties;

2. improved student discipline;

3. reduced school violence;

4. better working conditions for faculty and staff;

5. better acceptance and understanding of diverse students and their families;

6. enhanced interpersonal relationships among students;

7. enhanced attitudes, communication, and relationships among teachers, students, and families; and

8. more family participation in school events.

The families benefit by gaining:

1. increased power and understanding of education;

2. closer relationships with their children;

3. better community support;

4. better communication between home and school;

5. increased knowledge about how to help their children learn;

6. more information to provide positive learning activities at home;

7. better understanding of the curriculum, instruction, and events;

8. more opportunities to work with teachers;

9. better expectations about homework and home learning practices;

10. greater access to school (and community) resources; and

11. empowerment to make decisions that will enhance their children's education.

The students benefit by gaining:

1. higher achievement and motivation to learn;

2. a positive attitude toward school;

3. better-quality homework and more frequent completion of homework;

4. better attendance;

5. decreased dropout rates, suspensions, and discipline problems;

6. improved self-confidence; and

7. better family relationships.

The teachers benefit by gaining:

1. improved morale;

2. positive teaching experiences;

3. more support and appreciation from families;

4. fewer discipline problems;

5. responsive students;

6. less stress and frustration;

7. awareness of family diversity with less stereotyping;

8. closer relationships with students; and

9. higher expectations for all students.

Administrators benefit by gaining:

1. better relationships with students, families, and teachers;

2. fewer complaints from families;

3. better use of resources;

4. increased communication with families; and

5. greater family and community support.

The community benefits by gaining:

1. students who are prepared to work collaboratively as contributing members of society;

2. families who assist in the educational development of their children; and

3. schools that work within a broader community.

Examples of Partnerships

Schools can consider different types of partnerships and how they will meet students' needs. It is common to include families and educational professionals as primary partners. However, schools can also form partnerships with the broader educational community including local corporations, media agencies, sports teams, organizations, and ordinary citizens. Teachers and schools should work closely with partners to determine overall goals; the time needed to develop, implement, and sustain a partnership; and which area or areas of the curriculum would benefit most from a partnership. Three different types of partnership are described below: community, family, and professional. It should be noted, however, that many collaborations include more than one partner.

Community

Sisters in Science (n.d.) recruits retired and currently working women in science, engineering, and mathematics and female university students pursuing careers in science. This is an example of a **community partnership**. These individuals partner with teachers and serve as mentors for girls in elementary schools. This program is organized to improve girls' attitudes toward, interest in, and achievement in science and mathematics. In addition, the mentoring activities are developed to provide a positive learning environment for females and their families and to increase their knowledge base to promote girls' interest in science. This is a community partnership because members of the broader community participate in educational activities with students.

Family

In one **family-school partnership**, for example, three kindergarten teachers and students and their families work together to implement a program called *Literacy Mornings*. Students are encouraged to bring an older family member, a sibling, or a close family friend to the classroom for the first 40 minutes of school each Wednesday. During this time teachers, students, and family members read together and engage in activities related to concepts of print, early literacy skills, and phonemic awareness. The kindergarten teachers arrange for coffee, juice, and breakfast items and provide a welcoming and nonthreatening environment. A local bagel shop donates the baked goods, and the school provides the beverages. The families attend the event, enjoy reading with their child, learn more about encouraging literacy at home, and contribute breakfast treats on some of the days. The students decorate invitations and encourage their parents, older siblings, and other family members to attend at least once each month. Teachers in *Literacy Mornings* formed a professional partnership as they welcomed students and their families as their partners in the project.

Professional

The next example describes a **professional education partnership** called *Team Time* (Haynes, 2007). Four fifth-grade teachers collaborated and created a plan to help lower-performing math students. During *Team Time,* students are taught by one of the teachers in a small group. About 30 extra minutes of math practice are provided as teachers rotate the responsibility. The teachers meet weekly to discuss, collaborate about, and exchange ideas on how to provide extra help in teaching mathematics concepts and skills. They also discuss how to include more families to help these students at home. Together, they identified a need, determined how to collaborate to meet that need, and then worked together to execute the plan.

As you can see from the three different examples, educational partnerships can be small or large in scope and can be initiated by an organization, a group of professionals, or an individual teacher. As you read the rest of the book you will notice that partnerships vary in size and can include one teacher with a few families or a community organization, parents, and an entire K–8 school. In the following "Notes From the Classroom" section, Glenda, a third-grade teacher, describes her rationale for creating a partnership with the broader community.

Notes From the Classroom:
Glenda's Reasons for Creating a Community Partnership

Voice of Glenda, Third-Grade Teacher

From my earliest days as a teacher, students at risk for reading failure have been a source of both fascination and frustration to me. I felt fascinated when I was able to somehow find a key to help a student succeed. More often, I felt frustration when my efforts seemed in vain. I quickly discovered the role [community] volunteers could play in my classroom in unlocking the potential for more of these children. By enlisting the help of volunteers to read individually with struggling students, I was able to provide those who needed it most with more individual time, without neglecting the 30 other students in my classroom. I wondered, though, whether those well-intentioned paraprofessionals had the skills they needed to be as effective as they possibly could be. When I was given an opportunity to work with a committee to develop a school-wide volunteer tutoring program, I felt an even greater sense of responsibility for preparing well-trained volunteers.

The volunteer program itself was a bit of an unusual partnership. Volunteers were from a large, local church. Church members had been active in the community for years but usually in terms of inviting the community to participate in their own faith-based programs. This project, while an expression of their faith, would be a totally secular endeavor. They would participate in an after-school program for one hour each week for a period of 10 weeks.

SOURCE: Used with permission of Glenda Howard.

Characteristics of Effective Partnerships

Take a moment to consider schools you know of that have a strong ongoing relationship with families and the community. What are the characteristics of these partnerships? Usually, there are common goals that are communicated amicably. In addition, there is some form of collegiality, mutual support, and shared responsibility for educating children. Now, consider the families who participate in school activities—whether at home or through a visible presence at school. Which families are left out? What are some of the reasons that *all* families are not part of the larger school community? Are the school activities and weekly communication partial to one ethnic group over another? Do all families know that greater parental involvement in education results in higher student achievement? Think about these questions and your answers as you read about characteristics of effective partnerships.

Myriad characteristics related to **effective educational partnerships** exist. However, the most notable ones include respect, understanding, appreciation of cultural and linguistic differences, shared common goals, accountability, high returns, meaningful goals to all parties, commitment, leadership, partner feedback, and "buy-in." Partnerships are not one-sided (i.e., "I know best; you do not"), judgmental, forced, or dictated. They must be mutually created and involve a bond of trust, communication, and respect from all parties. In addition, all groups and individuals within an educational partnership must feel that they benefit in some way. This is a high order to fill when many families do not feel that they have the time, education, power, or confidence to assist their child in educational endeavors that will enhance academic achievement and learning. Therefore, educational partnerships must be culturally relevant and appropriate if the purpose is to encourage lifelong learning for students and their families. All families want the best for their children. However, many families do not feel that they have the experience or knowledge to be partners in education. The fact is, however, that prior educational background is not required to support children in their learning. There have been numerous stories of families who make education a priority, regardless of their formal education experiences, academic skill base, or native language. These families have children who succeed in K–12 schools, at notable universities, and beyond. Teachers are educators beyond the classroom and can work with families to ensure academic excellence for all students.

The Value of Partnerships

Education is not an isolated experience but an interactive endeavor that takes place over the course of a person's life. When the community, schools, and families work together, they can provide the best possible resources and expertise to enhance the education of all children. Therefore, it is a collective responsibility of many groups to educate children. Consider the experiences and feelings related to educational partnerships that you recorded in Table 1.1 at the beginning of the chapter. Keep these ideas in mind as you read the content and examples provided in this chapter and in the rest of the book.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Because partnerships among all groups enhance the learning and development of children, national organizations for university accreditations are setting standards for teacher education that include the preparation and competence needed for working with parents and the community as partners (e.g., National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2007). National teacher exams and national assessments for highly accomplished teachers also include parent and community involvement as a mandatory standard (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2007). The NBPTS outlines five core propositions related to what effective teachers should know and be able to do and the beliefs that characterize educators who apply for **National Board Certification**:

- Teachers are committed to students and learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to children.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

The information in this book will incorporate all five propositions but focus more intently on the fifth proposition related to teachers as members of learning communities. Within this proposition, teachers are charged with taking the initiative to collaborate and build partnerships with the larger community to enhance learning for all students, regardless of linguistic, cultural, or socioeconomic background. Teachers are also encouraged to work with other professionals to initiate and assess instructional policy, implement an effective curriculum in their classroom, and plan for their professional development needs. Most important, teachers should make it a priority to work with families to encourage collaborative participation in their child's education. If you are interested in becoming a National Board Certified Teacher, this book can assist you in planning for educational partnerships and delineating your beliefs, goals, and practices as a member of a learning community. In the following installment of "Notes From the Classroom," Sylvia, a third-grade teacher, reflects on becoming a National Board Certified Teacher.

Notes From the Classroom: Sylvia's Reflection on Becoming a National Board Certified Teacher

Voice of Sylvia, Third-Grade Teacher

Applying for and receiving National Board Certification (NBC) has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The same year, I earned my master's, but it did not hold the same meaning as receiving NBC. The NBC process truly made me a better teacher because I had to inspect my practice with a fine-tooth comb and really reflect on what I was doing in the classroom, why, and what was the outcome. It is a process that I still use in my practice today.

The fifth proposition, partnerships, was my weakest area. Because I had only taught for 3 years prior to applying for NBC, I hadn't developed this area yet. However, the NBC process made me realize the importance of partnerships and their benefit for students. I am still working on this area, but I admit it is still a weakness due to my lack of time to pursue it.

A Collaborative View of Educating Children

One evening, I was listening to a segment on the radio related to inequitable schools within the United States. The program started out with well-known statistics related to the achievement gap between students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds in addition to that between students from different ethnic groups. The achievement gap has decreased through the years but only by a small percentage (see Education Commission of the States, 2006, for additional information). The fact remains that children of color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds consistently score lower on achievement tests than White and Asian children from middle-class backgrounds. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2004) reported that Black 17-year-olds scored at about the same level as White 13-year-olds in both reading and mathematics. While I was listening to the radio that evening, the commentator pondered why students in lower socioeconomic areas have difficulty attaining the same academic achievement levels as other groups of students. There were no definitive answers, but voices of teachers and principals from different schools were featured to address academic challenges. Teachers from a high-achieving school stated that they had an active parent-teacher organization that engaged in fundraising and a gift-giving drive totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. This money is used to purchase musical equipment and to support a variety of special programs. The teachers and principals from a lower-achieving school indicated that their scores on achievement tests were so low that they provide copies of their weekly lesson plans to ensure academic standards are being met.

After listening to this discussion, it occurred to me that one reason for the achievement gap is that we are trying more of the *same* thing rather than trying to do things *differently.* This is one of the main reasons for this book. I hope that I can provide ways for educators to think outside of the box and consider community, family, and professional partnerships as one way of doing things differently to enhance the education and academic achievement of all children. More drilling, more practice, more planning, more meetings, more lesson plans, and more of everything are not necessarily the best ways to tap into the full academic potential of every child. However, bringing a network of community members, families, and schools together toward the same goal can be a fruitful place to start.

Educators can begin the journey of creating partnerships by learning more about the culture and beliefs of the families and children who attend their school. In addition, families should find out more about the teachers' background, philosophy, and goals for their children. This is an initial but extremely important step to building partnerships

between schools and families. I love the story that one of my graduate students told me about how a middle school principal chartered a bus and took all of the teachers around the community to show them the neighborhoods where their students lived. The students in this school lived in federally supported housing projects, middle-class ranch-style homes, and multimillion-dollar mansions on the hillside. The principal took to the microphone and provided information about each neighborhood as the tour progressed. Teachers were asked to make careful observations about their surroundings such as the amount of open space, yards, pets, activities, and vehicles during the tour. This information was collected and used to learn more about the students they taught, where they lived, and what after-school activities and hobbies they participated in. In addition, teachers gained knowledge about the resources around family homes that they could take into account when assigning interactive homework projects. The principal indicated that some of the teachers had taught at the school for more than 20 years and had never inquired into where their students actually lived.

Communities of Practice

Situated Learning

One of the reasons that some families do not choose to become involved with formal education is that they do not feel they are a part of the school community. They may feel uncomfortable talking to the teacher or even walking into the classroom. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) are known for their work on **situated learning (legitimate peripheral participation)** where they view learning and community as a social activity that develops from multiple experiences and different types of participation. We all partake in activities based on our home, community, and school. However, we have varying roles within each of these areas. At times we are at the core of the activity, and at other times we are on the periphery. Many times, the families of our students are on the periphery and stay there throughout their child's schooling because they never feel a sense of belonging within the walls of a school or classroom. This peripheral learning happens not just with families but also with many children who attend school as part of a classroom community for many years. These children and their families may always remain part of the periphery instead of actively engaging within the center of events. This is why educators should be aware of creating communities within the classroom that are based on culturally relevant pedagogy and a welcoming environment that includes all students and families.

Components and Examples of Communities of Practice

Collectively, learning results from the practices within these groups created over time and continued during shared social enterprises. Wenger (1998) refers to these groups as **communities of practice**, which can be formal or informal. The position of participating individuals may or may not change over time, but communities of practice always contain these three components: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire. Together, these components contribute to participation in a group or community and should be acknowledged by educators when building partnerships.

A **joint enterprise** pertains to the overall purpose of a community that is continuously negotiated and renegotiated by the members. **Mutual engagement** is what brings everyone together for a common goal. Members work together to create a functioning and ongoing partnership. **Shared repertoire** involves the type of resources such as routines, artifacts, and style that members develop over time. The repertoire is not verbally established but established through behaviors and expectations. Partnerships can be developed to include diverse groups of students and families so that they too can comfortably partake in activities related to educational events at school.

Rogoff (1994) also advocates the creation of a "community of learners" model in schools. She based her ideas on a comparison of Mayan families in Guatemala and middle-class American Anglo families within the United States. She concluded that children and adults have more success in learning situations, regardless of culture, when learning is coupled with participatory activities within their communities. Therefore, if students and families do not feel that they are part of the community at school, then learning cannot be optimized.

Another example of a school that seeks educational partnerships with the community is a K–8 public charter school where families, teachers, and outside community organizations work together to meet high academic achievement standards and promote rich cultural experiences. About 90% of the students in the school qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 60% of the students are from non-English language backgrounds. The school works collaboratively with a variety of community partners to supplement the arts, health, and physical education curriculum and to provide health and social services for students and their families. A community-based arts organization provides visual arts for students in grades K–8 and drama for students in grades 4–8. A community dance group provides dance classes for all K–8 students, and a music group provides flute and violin lessons to students in fourth and fifth grade. These partnerships allow the students to gain visual and performing arts skills from multiple role models and diverse perspectives. In addition to the three community partners that focus on the arts, the school works in partnership with a local medical group and the County Department of Health to provide wider access to social and medical services for families. The former principal of this school, Kendra Kecker (personal communication, June 11, 2007), discussed the following benefits of building educational partnerships:

Educational partnerships benefit the school, the teachers, the students, and their families, as well the broader community and society.

> At CNCA School, we strive to build partnerships that will help us create the comprehensive educational program we want for our students and also help to alleviate some of the barriers our children face that make it difficult for them to reach academic success. Through these partnerships we are able to incorporate arts education and provide a variety of resources to our students and families including mental and physical health services. By meeting the various needs of our students and providing resources to support the work of our teachers we believe we can truly prepare each of our students for success and put them on the path to college.

These partnerships benefit not only the school, the teachers, the students, and their families but also the broader community and society.

Equitable Teaching and Learning

Reaching Out to Families

Partnerships are necessary to obtain high educational achievement for all students—regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, family makeup, or ethnic group. Berliner and Biddle (1995) claim that schools could potentially overcome the effects of poverty and inequities among students by developing connections to community, their teachers, and their peers. Despite more intensive teacher education, standards-based education, and high-stakes accountability and testing, inequality and inequity continue to exist within many education systems. Currently, there are a growing number of students from non-English backgrounds who attend schools in the United States. This poses an additional challenge for schools and families to communicate with each other and to discuss common goals and beliefs about education. Some school districts sponsor family events to provide better links between learning at home and learning at school. Buses and child care are usually provided as families learn about volunteer opportunities at school and at home with their children. The perception of most educators and families is that one must physically be at a school site to participate in children's education. Involvement or engagement in a child's education can happen at home, a local park, a church, or another place outside of school. These activities are most successful when teachers and district personnel refrain from *telling* parents what they should and should not be doing. Instead, they provide opportunities for parents to interact with each other, share experiences, and consider ways that they could be more involved such as reading at home, playing math games, and writing for different purposes. Some school districts are reaching out in an even broader way by inviting individuals and organizations to share with families what they offer in the form of after-school clubs, free museum visitor days, public library computers and resources, low-cost sports teams, and other community activities.

Acculturation Versus Assimilation

The type of partnership described above with diverse families and the school district aligns with the idea of acculturation rather than that of assimilation. **Acculturation** celebrates the backgrounds and cultural beliefs of students and their families. It encourages individuals to integrate their beliefs with formal instruction and content, rather than

abandon their beliefs altogether. **Assimilation**, on the other hand, focuses on the idea that students and families should abandon their ethnic backgrounds and beliefs and adopt a different culture, usually one that is more mainstream. The assimilation view usually results in the loss of ethnic identification and self-worth. Therefore, educators should embrace acculturation as a more culturally relevant strategy when working with students and families because it enhances power, authority, and self-confidence.

Types of Educational Partnerships

A partnership is essentially an agreement entered upon by two or more groups or individuals. This agreement can be explicit or implicit. It can be spoken or unspoken. In schools, many of the partnerships with families and communities are implicit, where tradition sets the standard partnership practices. If we apply Elliot Eisner's (1985) three types of curricula to partnership models, this would result in explicit partnerships, implicit partnerships, and null partnerships:

- In an **explicit partnership**, schools, families, and communities explicitly outline written goals, strategies, and outcomes related to enhancing the education of children. They publicize these goals for all to know.

- In an **implicit partnership**, schools, families, and communities "talk" about common goals and ideals, but there is no specific goal, strategy, or outcome in place.

- In a **null partnership**, individuals or groups occupy the same space, but there is no communication related to specific goals, strategies, or outcomes for a partnership.

Each of these types of partnerships leads to a specific type of collaboration. Collaborative descriptions will be discussed in the next section.

Collaborative Descriptions

Veigel (2000) provides a model of research-practice collaboration that is derived from a modern management perspective. Given that good management is also critical to all types of collaborations, the following descriptions might be used to identify different levels of partnerships in education:

- *The No-Collaboration Collaboration.* Collaboration here might be an agreement between two parties who want to meet some externally imposed need or to satisfy some individual want. It is a partnership of convenience that is seldom consummated or annulled. For example, students visit a local museum on a field trip. However, there is no real prior or post communication or interaction between the school and the museum.

- *The One-Time Collaboration.* This type of collaboration is actually better described as a service offered for a service rendered. For example, a pizza restaurant sponsors a school family night where teachers, students, and families buy pizza on one specific evening. The pizza restaurant then donates a portion of the purchases to the school.

• *The Arms-Length Collaboration.* As in the exchange-of-services collaboration above, each party in this type of limited collaboration has a need to be met and a contribution to offer. However, in contrast, the essence of a true collaboration is first seen here: creating shared values together. For example, health professionals and teachers may work together for the purpose of designing a health services program that will become part of the school, yet the collaboration may be restricted to a limited time period. Health professionals may come to the school for 3 days during the school year to test the speech and hearing of children. A local community group may test children's vision in grades K–6.

• *The Arm-in-Arm Collaboration.* In this collaboration, the parties bring complementary resources for ongoing work that creates new value. Despite their complementary skills and interests, these groups come to the collaboration precisely because they recognize that working outside the collaboration would make it unlikely or impossible for them to produce the results that entice them to work together. Building on the previous example related to health services, this type of collaboration includes an ongoing commitment founded on a common goal in which all groups acknowledge that working together to meet their mutual needs outweighs self-interest. Therefore, multiple health professionals, the school, and families will meet on a regular basis to discuss the goals of the partnership and how to provide ongoing health services for students and families.

• *The Hand-in-Hand Collaboration.* Here, self-interest of each party is genuinely replaced by a primary focus on the shared values and products. The health services example can achieve the hand-in-hand collaboration when a program is mutually agreed upon, accepted, enacted, and continued with shared goals for students.

Table 1.2 provides different types of partnerships, examples, and characteristics.

Table 1.2 Partnership Types, Examples, and Characteristics

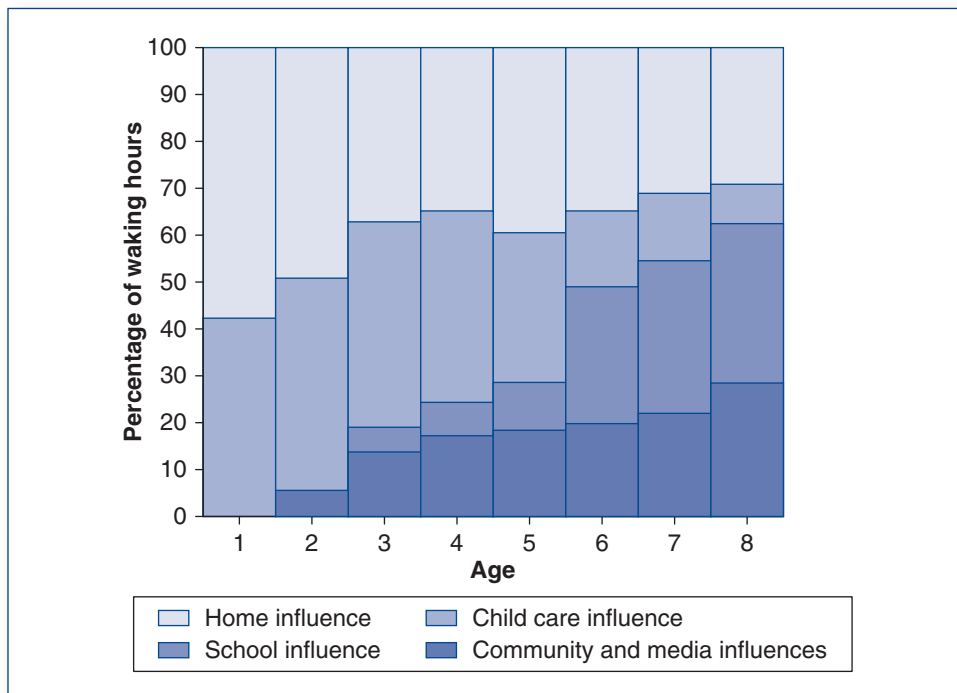| Partnership	Examples	Characteristics
No Collaboration	• A company provides backpacks to students • Free coupons/offers	• Shared and separate goals • Limited communication
One-Time Partnership	• Field trip to a museum • Outdoor science camp	• Shared and separate goals • Short-lived • Limited communication
Hand-in-Hand Partnership	• DARE programs • Parent-teacher organizations • Weekly volunteers	• Shared and separate goals • Ongoing over time • Trust, respect, etc.
Arm-in-Arm Partnership	• School site council when all parties have decision-making power	• No one group has "power" over the other • Shared goals (separate goals vanish) • Trust, respect, etc.

Home, School, and Community Influences

Influences on Students' Education

What factors influence a child's education? The answer is not a simple one; nor is there one person or one group who is responsible for this. In fact, a variety of factors influence students' learning and their education over time: family, friends, media, the community, and even personality types. Judith Rich Harris (1999) suggests in her book, *The Nurture Assumption,* that too much emphasis has been placed on students' families and home environment when they succeed at school or have difficulties. Instead, she discusses the power of the teacher and how he or she can influence students' overall achievement because teachers can influence the attitudes and behaviors of an entire group of children and youth. She advocates that the world outside the student's home (i.e., interactions within the community, with peers, and at school) has as much impact on a child's development and achievement as the world within the home.

Barbour, Barbour, and Scully (2005) suggest that educators identify and examine more closely the strengths of the multiple influences on children's knowledge and experiences. They created a chart that shows home, child care, school, and community and media influences (see Figure 1.1). The graph indicates percentages

Figure 1.1	Home, Child Care, School, and Community/Media Influences on Children's Knowledge and Experiences

of waking hours of American children and what influences learning and decision making. All children are born with home and child care influences, but by age 3 school and community begin to play a part. By age 8, children are affected as much by school/peers and community/media as they are by their own family. Media include music, television programs, toys, games, computers, and print. The community includes the neighborhood and experiences that surround the home.

Shared, Sequential, and Separate Responsibilities

Think about schools you have attended or schools where you have worked. What educational responsibilities are shared among the school, students' families, and the community? Are other responsibilities separate? Take a look at Table 1.3, which outlines shared, sequential, and separate responsibilities. Joyce Epstein (2001) distinguishes between these three areas, noting that the clarity of the distinction depends on who is defining them. In the table, make a list of what you believe are the shared, sequential, and separate responsibilities of schools, families, and communities. I have provided a few ideas from former students to help you begin. As you examine the table, determine whether or not you agree with the placement of the various responsibilities listed.

Table 1.3   Shared, Sequential, and Separate Responsibilities

| Responsibilities	Separate	*Sequential	Shared
School	Academic content School rules Discipline at school	1. Health screening 2. Hygiene 3. Participatory citizen	Beginning in Preschool: Social skills Communication work ethics Nutrition Safety Drug awareness Sex education Physical education Character education
Family	Media, TV, games Religion Culture Values	1. Health and vaccines 2. Hygiene 3. Responsible citizenship	Beginning at Birth: Social skills Communication work ethics Nutrition

Responsibilities	Separate	*Sequential	Shared
	Discipline Home Rules		Safety Drug awareness Sexual education Physical education Character education
Community and Society	Maintenance and funding for parks, beaches, libraries Laws	1. Health care 2. Citizens of a democratic society (i.e., voting) 3. Justice-oriented community	Beginning at birth: Social skills Communication work ethics Nutrition Safety Drug awareness Sexual education Physical education Character education

SOURCE: Adapted from Epstein (2001).

*These are numbered because they follow a specific order.

After you have examined the table and added some of your own ideas, what do you notice? You should see that it takes the school, students' families, and the entire community to educate children. Therefore, for optimum educational experiences and participation, all of these people and organizations must be involved. Take a look at the Partnership Tree in Figure 1.2. Notice that schools, families, and the community are blossoming together to support children's growth, knowledge, and development. Some responsibilities are shared, and some are separate. In addition, a firm "root system" must support the entire relationship in order for a partnership to "blossom."

Figure 1.2   Partnership Tree
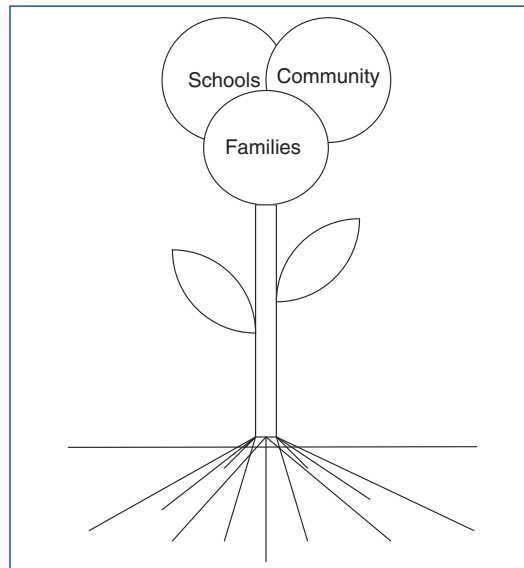
> ## Enhancing Learning for Students With Special Needs: Positive Partnership Strategies
>
> Partnerships are essential when working with students with special needs and their families. Teachers, service providers, and families work together to support the child's home and school environment and create an individual education plan that outlines instructional and behavioral strategies to promote optimum learning and achievement. This is a positive supportive plan that delineates separate, shared, and sequential responsibilities. Specific positive strategies include the following:
>
> 1. Include a translator for children non-English language backgrounds.
>
> 2. Determine the availability of assistive technology devices that may assist students and their families.
>
> 3. Consider positive interventions that will encourage self-confidence and responsibility in children.
>
> 4. Discuss and create strategies for connecting the students' home environment and experiences with the school environment, curriculum, and instructional strategies.
>
> 5. Create measurable, attainable goals that all parties endorse and agree with.

Partnership Types, Examples, and Characteristics

The information below provides a variety of terms that you will encounter within the book. This will help you distinguish between the multiple meanings of many of the terms used when discussing educational partnerships.

Community is a broad term used to describe a place such as a city, a neighborhood, or a classroom. A community can also be used to describe interactions and relationships among people or groups.

Culturally relevant teaching includes characteristics outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995) that include (a) assisting all students to achieve academic success, (b) focusing on cultural competence to help students maintain their own cultural integrity through classroom activities, and (c) ensuring critical consciousness activities address cultural norms, values, and social inequities.

Culture refers to behaviors exhibited by people or groups of people. These behaviors can include (but are not limited to) communication, language, gender roles, dwelling, clothing, art, music, food, and ethics.

English language learners are students who are learning English as their second language and whose native language is not English. English language learners are also described as students from non-English language backgrounds. These terms are preferred over terms used in the past such as *limited English proficiency* and *language deficient.*

Ethnic groups refer to people who may be of the same race but who share common cultural views and customs.

Ethnicity is used to describe someone's social identification and/or common cultural views and customs.

Family is a term used to describe a group of people who usually, but not always, live together at the same location. Family can include parents and guardians in addition to extended family members who play a significant role in children's lives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close friends.

Individual education plans, commonly referred to by educators and parents as IEPs, are required to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. An IEP team usually consists of teachers, service providers, and families who meet and create a mutually determined plan to assist a student with special needs educationally, emotionally, and/or physically.

Multiracial refers to people who describe themselves as belonging to two or more racial groups.

Parent is a term to describe primary caregivers of children. Anyone taking the role of raising a child is considered a parent. This includes legal guardians or grandparents who are responsible for a child or children. This also includes individuals who have shared custody of children.

A **partnership** is a written, spoken, or informal agreement where two or more people or groups work together toward mutual goals.

Professional is a term used to describe people who possess expertise and knowledge in a particular area. Their job usually requires some type of licensure or specific degree. In this text, professionals (for the most part) will refer to professional educators including teachers, university faculty, and administrators.

Race traditionally refers to a group of people sharing similar hereditary features or those who are united by nationality. Today, this term is used broadly to describe historical ancestry because there is little evidence of a "pure" human race in the world today. Many people are a combination of multiple races and therefore would have difficulty defining their exact race when asked. Many questionnaires are now asking families to specify multiple races to describe themselves. In the year 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau printed 15 different racial categories and "other race" that encouraged responders to choose multiple races. Some of the races on the census form included White, Black, African American, Asian Indian, American Indian, Alaska Native, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Native Hawaiian.

Racism involves the subordination of members of a specific racial group who have little power socially, culturally, or ethnically.

Stereotypes can be positive or negative. They include mental views, comments, or beliefs related to preconceived ideas about particular groups of people. Stereotypes and examples are described more fully in Chapter 8.

Transracial is a term used most often in cases where parents and children of different races live together. Transracial adoptions are common where a family in the United States adopts a child from another country or adopts a child of a different race within the United States. Many racial issues must be negotiated within the family during the child's life.

Chapter Summary

Educational partnerships are endeavors where one or more people or groups come together to enhance the education of children. When this happens, the effect is greater than the sum of the two parts. These partnerships do not happen instantly, and many times teachers and families face challenges because of time, different priorities, language, and cultural barriers. By enacting culturally relevant communication strategies, partnerships can be enhanced. It is suggested that teachers acknowledge student differences and value the concept of acculturation when working with students and their families. The process of acculturation celebrates the students' culturally and linguistically diverse background and encourages them to integrate their ideas, experiences, and beliefs into formal instructional practices and content.

Different types of educational partnerships exist, including community, professional, and family partnerships. These partnerships can be formal or informal, spoken or unspoken. Families, schools, and the community share many responsibilities in educating the whole child. When all of these groups work together, children can become more self-confident and achieve their full potential during school and throughout their lives.

CASE STUDIES

The two case studies in this chapter include a school-family partnership (Action Learning Walk) and a school-community partnership (CyberSisters). Action Learning Walks involve families by inviting parents to school to observe, reflect, and discuss literacy activities in the classroom and home. CyberSisters is an online program that pairs girls with community mentors to encourage better math and science achievement.

❖ Case Study 1.1: Action Learning Walks

This case study is adapted from Guerrero (2006) and Barrios (2006) and will feature a description and information related to an Action Learning Walk at an elementary school in Southern California. Parents of students at the school are invited to participate in a one-day Action Learning Walk with their child, the teachers, and other parents.

An Action Learning Walk begins by parents gathering in a school meeting area to discuss what will take place. Often, refreshments are served, and families are encouraged to interact informally. During this initial meeting, a teacher-facilitator discusses the agenda that will be followed and offers information in English and Spanish because many of the parents speak Spanish as their primary language. The information is connected to state content standards related to reading and outlines what the parents will be observing and what they should look for as they are interacting with their children in the classroom during the 30 to 45 minutes. Parents are given an observation checklist that includes questions such as "Does my child participate?" "Does my child pay attention?" "Can my child summarize the story?" "Does my child talk with his or her partner during think-pair-share time and stay on topic?" and "Does my child need more practice?" Finally, parents are asked to join their child in the classroom and participate in all activities with him or her.

Afterward, the classroom teacher will respond to questions and debrief what went on during the lesson and provide tips for helping each child at home. The parents have another opportunity to participate in an

activity with their child before meeting together again as a group. The teacher-facilitator will ask the parents as a group to discuss their experiences, voice concerns, and ask questions. Particularly, parents are asked to describe what they observed during class and to suggest ways of helping their child at home. Next, the teacher-facilitator will work along with the parents to create a take-home learning activity related to literacy based on their ideas and ideas from other educational sources. At the end of the session, the parents complete a voluntary anonymous survey related to their experiences with the Action Learning Walk. To close the session, parents' names are drawn, and prizes are given out in the form of flashcards, books, and other educational materials. Parents are encouraged to hang around, enjoy refreshments, and talk with each other as long as they like.

Voice of Olivia Guerrero, Third-Grade Teacher

The involvement and learning experience within an Action Learning Walk benefits students, parents, and the teacher because they work collaboratively to enhance achievement. These strategies will also help parents and family members become more aware of useful activities at home that support and encourage academic success at school. The Action Learning Walk is also aimed at building a community of learners that involves parents and teachers as learners and partners. (Guerrero, p. 4)

Parent involvement remains a vital dimension to students' academic success. Efforts designed to improve both the quantity and quality of parent involvement will continue to be an important component of school improvement programs and of strategies designed to reduce the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged counterparts. (Guerrero, p. 59)

Voice of Angelica Casas Barrios, Third-Grade Teacher

Being a Hispanic myself, I feel that it is my responsibility to take an active role in creating meaningful partnerships with parents and hence increasing parent involvement. Many teachers at my school would argue that we have already done all we can, including offering babysitting services, providing translators, and offering evening meetings. However, I know that there is much more that can be done; it is just a matter of having a positive attitude, having the true desire to involve parents, and developing common goals related to their child's education. (Barrios, p. 3)

Parents' Views

Angelica Casas Barrios surveyed 33 of the parents in her school who participated in the Action Learning Walk. The survey consisted of 10 questions related to their experiences. She found that the top three reasons that parents participated in the Action Learning Walk included (a) helping their child learn at home, (b) wanting to observe their child's learning style, and (c) wanting to become more involved in their child's education. Most parents would like to participate in more Action Learning Walks, particularly those focusing on a different subject area. Cumulatively, parents reported that they felt more informed about their child's performance at school and learned ways to help their child at home.

Teachers' Views

Olivia Guerrero surveyed teachers to determine their views related to the Action Learning Walk. One first-grade teacher, six second-grade teachers, and one third-grade teacher participated in the survey. Their

experience varied from being a first-year teacher to having 10 years of teaching experience. The teachers indicated the most valuable aspects of the Action Learning Walk for them:

- Teachers had the opportunity to observe parents working with their children.
- Teachers observed parents' priorities and behavior management skills.
- Teachers met parents and connected better with them on a personal level.
- Teachers observed parents while their child was succeeding or struggling with literacy skills.
- Teachers felt that parents were on the same page as they were.
- Teachers could create more home-school connections.
- Teachers learned about parents and if they wanted additional support.

The teachers also indicated the most valuable aspects of the Action Learning Walk for students:

- Students were motivated to perform well with their parents present.
- Students were excited to have their parents at school.
- Students were able to demonstrate hands-on learning of concepts.
- Students noticed that their parents were interested and active participants in education.
- Students learned with their parents.
- Students could share information and content that they were learning in school.

Finally, the teachers indicated the most valuable aspects of the Action Learning Walk for parents:

- Parents gained a better understanding about content standards related to literacy.
- Parents obtained tools, strategies, and resources to reinforce literacy skills at home.
- Parents were introduced to concepts that were essential to academic development.
- Parents observed what and how their children were being taught.
- Parents experienced hands-on activities that can be replicated at home.

Teachers also lamented, however, that they were disappointed that not all parents were able to participate due to work schedules and other obligations. They indicated that they wanted to find a way to include more parents and increase their level of participation. Teachers also suggested that a translator be available in classrooms during the Action Learning Walk to answer questions that parents had. Moreover, the teachers wanted to have a substitute teacher in the classroom so that the classroom teacher could participate in the Action Learning Walk debriefings with the teacher-facilitator after he or she observed his or her children. The teachers indicated that the biggest barrier to the planning and implementation of Action Learning Walks was related to the time needed to collaborate with other teachers to plan the activities. In addition, they indicated that more communication was necessary between the resource teachers at the school and the classroom teachers so that they could work together to plan the activities. All eight teachers indicated that they wanted to continue offering Action Learning Walks for parents during upcoming years.

SOURCE: Used with permission of Angelica Casas Barrios and Olivia Guerrero.

❖ Case Study 1.2: CyberSisters

This case study is adapted from Roth-Vinson (2000). It includes a partnership where university women work with middle school girls to enhance their achievement in math and science. Roth-Vinson stated

that when it comes to math, science, and technology, all girls are "at risk" because they are excluded from many of these careers. The CyberSisters program is a telementoring program to improve gender equity in science, math, and technology. College women serve as mentors and are paired with middle school girls. The initial funding for the project came from the Willamette Science and Technology Center in Oregon and the American Association of University Women in partnership with local universities, foundations, businesses, and school districts. CyberSisters is an online mentoring program that aims to achieve the following goals: (a) increase the number of middle schools girls who have positive experiences in science, math, and technology; (b) supplement middle school girls' knowledge and interest in math, science, and technology; (c) develop leadership skills and opportunities for middle school girls; (d) expand the number of academic-based women role models in science, math, and engineering; (e) expand the involvement of college women mentors in K–12 settings; (f) promote middle school girls' experiences with university life; (g) foster greater community awareness about gender equity; and (h) bring together appropriate organizations at the national level to begin strategizing about solutions to gender equity issues.

Voice of "Annie," Eighth-Grade Student

Working on a science project that I got to choose with my mentor and presenting it in front of an audience has made it easier for me to answer questions in my science and math classes. I feel more motivated to work harder in those areas. (Roth-Vinson p. 24)

Voice of "Caroline," Seventh-Grade Student

Through meeting other women in the science field, I have decided that science is definitely a field I will explore when I'm older. (p. 24)

Voice of "Ms. O'Connor," Middle School Science Teacher

CyberSisters has been an effective way for me to provide opportunities for girls in my classroom to learn with individual guidance. With the time and attention of an interested adult mentor, my students are much more aware of how to use local museums and computer technology to find information about science and math topics that interest them. (p. 26)

Voice of "Ms. Smithson," Middle School Math Teacher

I started a girls' club called Geogirls because I have experienced a very real gender gap in the fields of math and technology. . . . Geogirls is partnering with CyberSisters to provide the girls with one-on-one college mentors in science, math, and technology. Geogirls started as a team for girls in geometry who wanted to work together to learn how to create their own Web site. The first year, six enthusiastic girls spent one to two hours each week before or after school learning HTML coding, drawing or creating computer graphics, researching information, writing, and putting it all together in an award-winning Web site called Geogirls. (p. 26)

SOURCE: Roth-Vinson (2000). Used with permission.

❖ ## Reflecting on the Cases

1. How does collaboration enhance student learning within the two case studies *Action Learning Walks* and *CyberSisters?*

2. Describe the partners in each case study and discuss examples of shared power and decision making.

3. Describe the roles of each partner in the Action Learning Walks. List revisions to the current Action Learning Walk program that would make the partnership more collaborative and/or more culturally relevant.

Activities for Further Development

1. Create a list of resources in your community that would be helpful in enhancing the education of children. Next, discuss partnership possibilities related to each of the resources.

2. Think about an educational partnership that you know about or one that you have been involved with. Identify the partners. Would you consider it to be a community partnership, a professional partnership, a family partnership, or a combination of two or more? Explain why.

3. Conduct an online search to locate resources and educational activities that can be integrated into the school curriculum that will assist students with understanding and appreciating race, culture, and economic diversity within their lives and their community.

4. When a teacher invites parents to come into the classroom to showcase student work and other activities, this is not necessarily a partnership. How can you organize a student showcase evening to be more interactive and include characteristics of true partnerships?

Additional Reading and Information

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools.* New York: Harper Perennial. This book is already considered a classic. Kozol reports of his experiences in multiple urban schools. He reports the good, the bad, and the ugly related to inequalities and challenges that these schools face daily.

Sanders, M. G. (1999). Improving school, family, and community partnerships in urban middle schools. *Middle School Journal, 31*(2), 35–41. This article includes research and recommendations related to enhancing family and community involvement in the middle grades.

The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) is a monthly news Web site that is sponsored by the Harvard Family Research Project to provide resources for families and educators and to promote collegial networks within the field of education: http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators

The Institute for Responsive Education outlines information about a parent leadership exchange project. The project is sponsored by the Cambridge College School of Education and focuses on research, policy, and advocacy activities to enhance the shared responsibility of schools, families, and the community to educate children and improve education: http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/teleconference/aug15files/ire.pdf

The National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University promotes the involvement of schools, families, and communities in the education of children and youth. Its Web site highlights research, evaluation, and partnership project examples: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000

The U.S. Department of Education offers research, statistics, current government-sponsored educational programs, and publications: www.ed.gov