

A Conceptual Framework for Parent Involvement

BARBARA TUCKER CERVONE
AND KATHLEEN O'LEARY

Several years ago we began to search for a simple yet comprehensive framework for viewing parent involvement. We ended up with the *Parent Involvement Continuum*. It works as follows.

We see parent involvement as falling along a continuum that stretches from activities in which the parent is the passive recipient of information to activities in which the parent is an active partner in the educational process. To our eyes parent involvement falls into four categories: "Reporting Progress," "Special Events," "Parent Education," and "Parents Teaching." Figure 1, which includes involvement strategies we know best, provides a visual summary of our approach to parent outreach efforts. The strategies listed are by no means exhaustive.

The passive-active continuum flows both vertically and horizontally. This means that in any individual category, the activities range from those in which parents play a relatively passive role to those in which parents take an active part. For example, the category "Reporting Progress" begins with Good News Notes (occasional messages from the teacher that parents need not answer) and ends with Home-School Notebooks (weekly or even daily exchanges of information between parents and teachers). The latter clearly requires a time commitment from parents that the former does not. Reading horizontally, the continuum moves from "Reporting Progress," a category that allows

Barbara Tucker Cervone is Project Trainer and Kathleen O'Leary is Project Coordinator, BICO Special Needs Educational Collaborative, Project Partnership, North Attleboro, Massachusetts.

Parent Involvement Continuum

Parents as Passive Participants	Good News Notes	Open House	Welcoming Committee	
	60 Second Phone Calls	Audiovisual Presentations	Parent Bulletin Board	
	Star of the Week	Potluck Supper	Information on Home and Weekend Activities	
	Newsletter	Father's/Mother's/Sibling's Day	Information on Community Resources	
		Spring Fling	Lending Library (Book, Toy, Record)	Make and Take Workshop
		End-of-the-Year Picnic	Classroom Observations	Teachable Moments
		The Gym Show	Workshops on Topics of Interest to Parents	Home Worksheets
	Call-In Times		A Course for Parents	Parents Teaching in the Classroom
	Parent-Teacher Conferences		Parent-to-Parent Meetings	Parent Objectives in the IEP
			(Parent Leaders)	(Parent Leaders)
Parents as Active Participants	Home-School Notebooks	(Parent Leaders)	(Parent Leaders)	
	Reporting Progress	Special Events	Parent Education	Parents Teaching
	Parents as Passive Participants			Parents as Active Participants

for more passivity on the part of parents, to "Parents Teaching," which demands an active commitment.

Contained within the continuum are several important messages. First, parent involvement programs must provide a range of activities. Not all parents can be active partners in their children's education. Cultural and language barriers, family situations, or economic conditions may keep some parents from ever being more than passive recipients of information. When the flow of communication home is infrequent and meager, these parents become isolated and out of touch with their children's progress. A good parent involvement program therefore includes strategies for keeping less visible parents "connected" as well as strategies to stimulate and tap the potential of highly visible parents. What this also says is that there are few, if any, activities that will reap 100 percent parent involvement; teachers must forgive both themselves and parents

when any one strategy brings only partial success.

Second, teachers who want parents to be actively involved in their classrooms must give careful thought to how they are going to move parents along the passive-active continuum. Some parents may be ready, for example, to jump right into volunteering in the classroom; all they need is the invitation. Others—the majority—will need encouragement and preparation before they feel comfortable as classroom volunteers. When selecting an item from the involvement continuum, teachers must consider preparatory activities to lay the groundwork for making a chosen item more successful. Teachers must whet parent interest and prepare parents for participation.

Third, teachers must weigh and consider their own readiness with regard to enlisting parents as active partners. Class observations, for example, can be as uncomfortable for the teacher as for the parent. Parents are not the only ones

who may see the classroom as the teacher's province; many teachers do too. It is therefore essential that teachers figure out where *they* fall on the involvement continuum and, in turn, figure out how they can best equip themselves to move along the continuum. No teacher should have to jump into an activity for which he or she does not feel prepared.

A Postscript

If we were to add a fifth column to the end of our *Parent Involvement Continuum*, we would call it "Parents as Educational Decision Makers." Leading the items in this column would be parents as active and equal participants in evaluation meetings involving their children. The best way to equip parents to be equal partners in educational assessments is to open classroom doors wide to parents, thus preparing them to make key decisions about their children's education. EL

Copyright © 1982 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.