Boundary Dynamics: Implications for Building Parent-School Partnerships

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Abstract

This article draws on systems theory, complexity theory, and the organizational sciences to engage boundary dynamics in the creation of parent-school partnerships. These partnerships help children succeed through an emergent process of dialogue and relationship building in the peripheral spaces where parents and schools interact on behalf of children. Historically, parental involvement and parent education programs evolved from mechanistic thinking. This review and interpretation of multidisciplinary research suggests reframing parent-school partnerships in the context of schools as learning communities that generate new knowledge and innovation as the experiences and competencies of teachers and parents interact to make tacit knowledge explicit. Knowledge society concepts including social capital, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, and communities of practice are applied to parent-school partnerships. Acknowledging vast contributions of research to current understanding of parental involvement, the article also explores the limitations of existing theoretical models and seeks to expand that understanding through the introduction of boundary dynamics and systems thinking.

Key Words: parental involvement, school reform, systems theory, communities of practice, tacit knowledge, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, social capital, families, parents, schools, learning, education, boundary dynamics, partnerships

Introduction

On the surface, parental involvement in children's schools seems uncontroversial. Most agree that parents play an important role in their children's education and are indeed the first educators of children. Parental involvement is clearly linked to children's academic, social, and emotional development, and building parent-school partnerships is one strategy for improving student success worldwide (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 1999; Gonzalez, 2004; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Schleicher, 1992). Yet despite extensive research, family involvement experts also agree that parent-school partnerships have not received the research attention they deserve and suggest the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework to guide partnership development (Caspe, 2008; Ferguson, Ramos, Rudo, & Wood, 2008).

This article proposes that boundary dynamics, derived from recent scientific approaches to understanding complexity, can expand existing theory and knowledge about parental involvement and parent-school partnerships, providing a broader theoretical bridge to understanding the innovation and learning possible at the boundaries and peripheries between parents, schools, and communities. After a review of current and historical paradigms of parent-school relationships and their limitations, the article suggests a shift in thinking to reflect more closely the knowledge used to build learning communities and create innovation in today's complex global environments. Parental involvement literature is combined with research from the fields of complexity theory, systems theory, and organizational science to explore the challenges and opportunities that parents and schools face as they seek to improve achievement for all children.

Parent-school partnerships are extraordinarily complex. Considering the millions of individual parent and educator minds that continually assimilate values, develop worldviews, engage in communication, and interpret behavior, it is difficult to define parental involvement and parent-school partnership in a single policy or regulation. The U.S. No Child Left Behind Act mandated that schools increase parental involvement to help improve academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Yet consensus on how best to accomplish this goal amidst the even greater challenge of higher academic standards imposed on schools remains elusive. Many principals and teachers stress the importance of parental involvement while negating or negatively judging its impact (Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007), and educators experience many barriers in communicating across boundaries with families (Dodd & Konzal, 1999, 2002; Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Systems thinking focuses on parent-school partnerships through perceived boundaries to explore where and how learning occurs at the edges of interaction between people in different systems. These boundary dynamics (MacGillivray, 2006, 2008) are crucial to school reform and understanding the relationships of those committed to educating future generations. Critical review of literature on tacit knowledge, social capital, actionable knowledge, networked innovation, and communities of practice contributes to an understanding of how parent-school-community partnerships are fostered, and illustrates a proposed new direction for research and practice in the field.

Historical Link to Current Paradigm

Current views of parental involvement in U.S. education are inextricably linked to the history and early objectives of public education. In 1930, professionals who attended the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection proposed that parent education would help teach parents the norms of society, proper ways to raise children, and understanding of social issues (Berger, 1991). During this same timeframe, the public school structure was founded with mechanistic ideals envisioning its functioning as a closed, self-sufficient system. Responsibilities within the system were fragmented between principals, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other professionals, each performing specialized tasks. Parent education was seen as a subspecialty and a necessary way of helping immigrant and indigent families assimilate into middle-class society, adopting the values and attitudes of the prevailing culture (Gordon, 1977). Schools were the identified vehicle to centralize this task.

Racism hindered the assimilation of African Americans and diverse others into the culture. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, parental involvement again comprised an important part of helping ethnic minorities adopt the values of the dominant race. Head Start, a program developed during this time to provide services to low-income children, included the insights of parents in its governance and policy structure. The participation of minority and low-income parents helped educators recognize the importance of cultural and class diversity as an asset rather than a disadvantage (Berger, 1991).

The 1970s saw a strengthening of federal support programs for parents and an emphasis on the connection between home and school on the premise that the interconnections between systems are as important for child development as the activities within them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ira Gordon emphasized three important ideas, that "the home is important and basic for human development; parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development; and the early years of life are important for lifelong

development" (1977, p. 72). Insisting that teachers must learn from parents as well as parents from teachers, Gordon pointed out that educators needed to develop new attitudes toward parents, including "new skills in communication and group processes and sharing" (p. 77). While an emphasis on mutual teacher-parent learning was a shift in thinking about the relationship between parents and schools, that shift was not operationalized into schools' structure.

The past 30 years produced extensive research on parental involvement (Davies, 1987; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Ferguson et al., 2008; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), much of it evolving as a means to improve the outcomes of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments (Smit, Driessen, Sleegers, & Teelken, 2008) and focusing on programmatic rather than systemic interventions. During this period, the use and operational definitions of the term *parental involvement* varied, including:

- the degree of communication parents have with teachers and the school about their children (Epstein, 1991; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999);
- parent-child interaction around homework (Clark, 1993; Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000);
- aspirations parents hold and communicate for their children's academic achievement (e.g., Bloom, 1980; Lopez, 2001);
- parents participation in school activities (Mapp, 1999; Stevenson & Baker, 1987);
- parental rules imposed in the home that affect education (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986); and
- developing a supportive home environment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Xu, 2001).

While research has contributed greatly to understanding parental involvement, the wide array of definitions and contexts studied and the lack of applicable theory complicate association of various forms of involvement with academic achievement and replication of programs from one school to another.

The most widely used theoretical model for studying parent-school partnerships is Epstein's classification of six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1987, 1990, 1995). Epstein's framework, built on social networking theory, emphasized a set of *overlapping spheres of influence* in which parents, teachers, and others have the potential to influence student learning and development. Epstein's model, adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association, encouraged a great deal of research, discussion, and debate in the field of family involvement. The model acknowledges many influences on children's learning, but is primarily unidirectional, exploring the

explicit ways in which families help children learn and develop. But the model does not consider the multidimensional or tacit aspects of learning between parents, educators, students, and community. Some studies supported the link between Epstein's classifications of involvement and academic benefits to students (e.g., Henderson, 1987). Others found no association between academic success and the six variables (e.g., Catsambis, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). Numerous schools of thought operate in the field of family involvement, including those that focus on the psychological processes of parental intrinsic motivation and role identity (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Thus, while perspectives differ, a great deal of foundational research confirms the importance of many types and contexts of parental involvement.

In recent years, the language has changed, from *parental involvement* and *participation* to *parent-school partnerships*, which implies the shared and equally valued roles in education described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Gordon (1977). Another term gaining wide usage is *parent engagement*, emphasizing the importance of parent's active power-sharing role as citizens of the education community rather than people who participate only when invited. However, the shift in language has yet to change the fragmented focus of the research, and many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement. One of the main barriers to partnership may be schools' mechanistic worldview, which separates educators and parents rather than integrally connecting them. Educators see themselves as experts rather than equals, creating a hierarchical relationship with parents (Lasky, 2001; Smit et al., 2008). Misconceptions and mistrust between parents and schools also make partnership difficult (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker, Denessen, & Brus-Laven, 2007; Frame, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007).

Internationally, the term *partnership* increasingly emphasizes a broad range of meaningful and cooperative relationships between parents and schools that improve students' learning, motivation, and development (Davies & Johnson, 1996). Epstein (1995) identified steps important in developing collaborative relationships between parents and schools, including an action team of teachers, parents, and school board members to oversee parental involvement efforts, financial support, and explicit goals. Dodd and Konzal (2002) expanded the definition of participation via a multi-functional view of parents and educators as a community of learners. Yet, these steps must be augmented by acceptance of a shared worldview toward partnership, which perceives the school as an open system that engages in learning at the boundaries between family, school, and community. Without equitable relationships, partnership success is unlikely. Mandates may be needed to overcome natural organizational resistance

to change, yet mandates alone will not create new conditions where partnership can thrive.

As noted above, the recent emphasis on *partnership* evolved from mechanistic and linear thinking. This reductionistic lens created boundaries between functions of learning, dissecting problems, and analyzing information to predict and manage outcomes. This reductionist way of thinking also emphasizes rigorous standards and positivist methodology, forcing many parental involvement programs, structures, and processes to be validated prior to adoption or funding. This approach leaves little room for individual, family, and community values and beliefs or differences in context between school settings. Traditional scientific tools, while extremely valuable in understanding aspects of parent, school, and community relationships, most often examine parts instead of the whole. Thus, danger lurks in elevating positivist metrics to shape broad thinking about parental involvement or limiting the vision of what is possible. Peter Senge eloquently captured this idea:

> If I had one wish for all our institutions, and the institution called school in particular, it is that we dedicate ourselves to allowing them to be what they would naturally become, which is human communities, not machines. Living beings who continually ask the questions: Why am I here? What is going on in my world? How might I and we best contribute? (2000, p. 58)

Reframing Parent-School Relationships

A systems approach to the study of parental involvement requires reorientation from the historic view of linear, cause-and-effect relationships toward a more holistic understanding of partnerships. New perspectives must be sought that more broadly address how parents, schools, and communities will work together to face the challenges and complexities of education in the 21st century. Not only do parents and educators influence a child's learning, they also hold the keys to understanding and potentially solving many of today's social issues that hinder learning and motivation. The theory of living systems – developed in the fields of biology, Gestalt psychology, ecology, general systems theory, and cybernetics – engages parents, schools, students, and communities as an integrated whole rather than as mere parts of the process of children's learning. Systems thinking embraces a view of the world through relationships, connectedness, and context rather than quantitative measurements. Through this reframing, the term *partnership* is more than rhetoric; it becomes "a key characteristic of life" (Capra, 1994, p. 8) in school communities.

The concept of partnership and its natural processes as understood by systems theorists (e.g., Bateson, 1972; Capra, 1996; Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 1992) is widely supported in the literature on education and school reform (Banathy, 1992, 1993; Banathy & Jenlink, 1996; Capra, 1999; Senge, 2000). Thus, rather than focusing on parts of systems or spheres of influence, partnership emphasizes improvement of the entire system. Clearly, parental involvement in education integrally supports children's learning and success. Each school's own social system must be explored through the lens of its own relationships. Parental involvement as a *project* often fails. But when integrated within the relationships of the school, over time, parental involvement becomes more powerful (Comer & Haynes, 1991). These integrated relationships have the potential to generate learning for children and for adults seeking to address and solve the complex issues of our times.

Complexity theory has evolved from systems thinking over the past several decades and has been successfully applied to understanding organizations (Klein, 2004; Lissack & Letiche, 2002). *Emergence*, one of complexity theory's key elements, describes the unpredictable learning and innovation that develop as the result of human interconnections within and between systems. This learning results from unexplained collaborative processes inherent in groups of individuals working together. Boundary dynamics are critical to emergence, including growing evidence of diffused boundaries between the educational tasks of schools and the parental tasks of families (Smit et al., 2008). This indicates a greater potential for collaboration and innovation as the intersections of these systems soften and overlap. This type of thinking supports aspects of Epstein's (1987, 1990, 1995) framework of overlapping spheres of influence, and provides a broader theoretical bridge to expand the thinking on parent-school-community partnerships. Instead of fragmented areas or ways that parents help children learn, emphasis focuses on the relationships that transform adult learning into action that benefits outcomes for children.

Learning and Leadership

Reframing the parent-school relationship actualizes two powerful insights from systems thinking: a new understanding of learning and leadership. The focus on learning involves everyone in the system: parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community. Principals view their schools as systems that interact with and constantly adapt to their environment, working as *boundary spanners* to facilitate collaboration and learning between systems (Bradshaw, 1999). Like biological systems, each school resides within other systems in overlapping, shared environments. Environments and boundaries between

environments cannot be viewed by linear variables, but the blueprint for these interactions can be altered in ways that produce positive change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); "The principles of ecology can also be interpreted as principles of community" (p. 8). Exploration of the social ecology of schools and how its principles apply to building parent-school partnerships can help leaders take positive action on behalf of children.

Educational values, policy, and strategy are traditionally transmitted from above and carried out by teachers and school administrators. However, reform must begin from below, where people are involved in making the daily decisions that determine their future (Brecher, Costello, & Smith, 2000). The relationship between parents and schools occurs in local school communities, not in the policy halls of Congress. The local school can drive this type of reform – a process of experimental behavior, thought, and dialogue between parents, schools, and communities. Leaders in the field of family involvement agree that the relationships between parents and schools cannot be constructed from the top down, but must involve a bottom-up component of grassroots leadership (Caspe, 2008). This bottom-up action is vital to systems change, transformation that occurs in the "nooks and crannies in and around the dominant institutions" (Brecher et al., 2000, p. 24). Systems theorists (Ashby, 1956; Bertalanffy, 1956; Buckley, 1968) first framed the idea that these nooks, crannies, boundaries, and peripheries between organizations and their environments were fertile for the creation of new knowledge. These boundary dynamics are intimately linked to education reform.

A Boundary Perspective on Parent-School Partnerships

Parental involvement in education currently emphasizes understanding various spheres, or areas, where parents influence student learning and development. Another focus is communicating explicit knowledge that researchers and schools believe is important for positive family involvement in education. This lens, historically linked to mechanistic notions that parents need guidance toward prevailing beliefs and practices, is helpful in transferring knowledge. However, it is limited in its effectiveness to understand and develop partnerships that create new knowledge. While many parents need and appreciate transfer of information, this unidirectional process lacks the characteristics of a learning organization, where people's capacity to learn exists at all levels (Senge, 2006). In schools, this includes children, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members – all those who have an investment in the outcome of education. This multidimensional approach takes into account the tacit nature of knowledge. Systems thinking integrates this approach and encompasses the

boundaries at which participants interact in both organized and casual ways. Learning in these borderlands surpasses taking in information; learning at the boundaries generatively creates a future together.

Tacit Knowledge

Communities that share boundaries must engage in relationship building and dialogue to make tacit knowledge explicit (Leonard-Barton, 1995; Polanyi, 1966; von Hippel, 1988; Zollo & Winter, 2002). Those involved in the dialogue must be willing to alter their own views to produce new learning. Programs that involve storytelling between parents and teachers, structured dialogue between parents and students, or communication between schools and community leaders across boundaries have the potential to generate learning. Family involvement practitioners and researchers agree that boundaries must be crossed for parent-school partnerships to take place (Davies, 1997; Epstein, 1990). Dialogue at these boundaries makes tacit knowledge explicit, and thus may help solve today's social problems and facilitate learning for both adults and children.

Many of the boundaries between parents and schools are perceived as walls rather than places to interact and learn. Empirical studies illustrate many barriers to communication and learning, particularly between working-class parents and schools (Crozier, 1999; Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 1996; Vincent, 2001). Kurt Lewin (1936) discussed the importance of understanding resistance at the boundary edge, suggesting that boundaries have different degrees of rigidity, elasticity, and solidity (pp. 123-124). Resistance in schools may take the form of a principal unwilling to engage at the boundaries or a teacher who views parents as a distraction from the work of education. Overcoming these obstacles will not be easy without new thinking by educational leaders who are willing to look at partnership with parents as an opportunity to garner diverse resources toward action that benefits children's learning and development. All relationships in the systemic framework of schools are viewed as having potential for social capital.

Social Capital

Social capital is a resource used to facilitate human action toward productive outcomes, obtained through the relationships of individuals in a social system (Coleman, 1988). Social capital includes people's degree of interconnectedness within a social network and the density of their social ties. Shared norms and expectations strengthen social ties. Dodd and Konzal (2002) attributed issues of trust and respect as foundational to building social capital within school communities. The metaphor "it takes a village to raise a child" depicts

an example of social capital between parents and schools. The more people tie together socially and interconnect because they value children's success in school and life, the greater potential for productive outcomes. If a teacher and parent know, trust, and respect one another, there is a greater likelihood that one will initiate contact with the other when needed to help the child.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) highlighted the importance of interconnectedness to social capital and underscored the advantages to individuals outside of the mainstream group. For example, lower income and ethnically diverse parents who traditionally have less access to resources for their children benefit greatly from social networks as a way of accruing benefits otherwise unavailable to them (Santana & Schneider, 2007). Educational research on social capital and trustworthiness between teachers, parents, and students has been linked to student academic success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, 2003).

Some studies illuminate a dark side of social capital and its potential negative effects in schools. Sil (2007) used critical theory to examine the unequal consequences of social capital that powerful parent groups have on those less connected. In his classic interpretation of the social capital wielded by influential mainstream residents of small-town Mansfield and its schools, Peshkin (1978) described the creation of an underserved, unhappy, and unrecognized group of families. The importance of examining interconnectedness and social capital are integral to a systemic way of thinking. Thus, exploration of how it is positively or negatively constructed for diverse socioeconomic and ethnic groups and utilized to benefit students is important to understanding parent-school partnerships.

Actionable Knowledge

Problem solving between parents, students, schools, and communities is complex and often requires more than simple solutions. Relevant dimensions of a problem, as seen by both parents and educators, must be explored to craft a solution that is reasonable and appropriate to the social contexts of the proposed action. Problem solving is linked to *actionable knowledge*, a concept that represents a pragmatic view of knowledge as expressed by the great educators William James (1907) and John Dewey (1916). The transforming of knowledge into action modifies the environment and propels people forward. Actionable knowledge comprises intellectual resources, both conscious and unconscious, and must bridge the divide between classes and categories of people through "the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another" (Dewey, 1916, pp. 400-401). Actionable knowledge is generated at peripheries between parents, schools, communities, and any other systems working to educate children.

Systems thinking focuses on relationships, not things or subjective rules. Thus, interpersonal relationships are central to generating actionable knowledge in organizations (Cross & Sproull, 2004); up to 95% of people studied in organizations credit their relationships with others, not designated experts, as contributing most to their decision-making and creation of new actionable knowledge (pp. 448-458). In their description of a synergistic paradigm for school communities, Dodd and Konzal (2002, pp. 125-127) emphasized relationship-building as paramount to new learning. Thus, social networks between parents, parents and schools, and schools and communities nurture actionable knowledge.

Networked Innovation

Networking and the concept of life as a web of human connection provide a useful metaphor for understanding social ecology and systems thinking and for viewing parent-school-community partnerships. The cycles of activity and communication between school and community organizations are remarkably reminiscent of the ecological lifecycles of systems theory (Hands, 2005). *Networked innovation* describes an organizational generative learning process that occurs through relationship building and communication free of reliance on hierarchical control (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005). Human networks enable the transfer of knowledge across boundaries. In fact, boundary-spanning communication plays an important role in generating new ideas (Conway, 1995).

Innovation in parent-school communities is any collaborative process that creates positive change and improves the success of children. It means being collectively open to new ideas and solutions that enhance learning and development. An organization depends on intensive interactions with its environment to be innovative (Fagerberg, 2004). It is not difficult to bridge this learning to the field of education, realizing the importance of innovation generated in the peripheries between home and school.

Schools use email, bulletin boards, and newsletters to communicate with parents. While school-to-parent communication mostly transfers knowledge from school to home, the technological revolution facilitates not only access but also the capacity to create new knowledge (Castells, 1996). Fostered by the common goal of helping kids succeed, technology has potential implications for learning and innovation between parents and schools as they interact in the borderlands of cyberspace.

Communities of Practice

Teachers, principals, counselors, parents, and many others in the peripheral community share a common practice of educating the whole child. *Communities*

of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their understanding and knowledge of this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Communities of practice work at the boundaries between systems to build social capital, generate new knowledge, and nurture problem solving and innovation. Now an established concept of organizational science, communities of practice emphasize the learning that people do together rather than individual specialties or roles such as parent, teacher, administrator, or other expert. Community-of-practice boundaries are very flexible and membership includes whoever participates. Because these groups exchange and interpret information, they are ideal avenues for moving information across boundaries (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice differ from social networks because they specifically exist as a collective process of dialogic learning. For parents and schools to constitute a community of practice, they must value the knowledge and experience of one another and work through the structures and processes designed to collaborate across boundaries. The membership of communities of practice constantly changes as the communities create opportunities to share, learn, and apply new knowledge at home and in the classroom.

Family-school partnerships of the 21st century must go beyond equipping parents with skills and knowledge. It must involve them in the process of learning. Influenced by Vygotsky's theory of learning and development, Wells (2004) emphasized the importance of the "co-construction of knowledge by more mature and less mature participants engaging in activity together"(p. xii). This type of collaborative learning plays an important role in communities of practice.

Applying systems thinking to parents and schools naturally brings focus to the boundary dynamics between them and the many other common boundaries shared by those invested in educating today's young people. The relationship between parents and schools surpasses complementarity to functional integration. Yet functional integration does not mean the two become one; instead, it means that the parents' role transcends participation and involvement toward the possibility of integration into the learning and knowledge creation process.

Implications for Research and Practice

To create and nurture parent-school partnerships different from their historical ancestors, a focus on leadership and learning is essential. The decisions that parents make about becoming more involved in education are highly influenced by schools (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Thus, school leadership

plays an important role in fostering relationships at the environmental boundaries that lead to generative learning and positive outcomes for children.

School principals, teachers, administrators, and others who work with parents must embrace the role of *boundary spanner,* learning how to build relationships that hover at the peripheries between home, school, and community. Research must explore these relationships and boundary spanning activities:

- What is the nature of boundary conflicts between parents and schools?
- How do parents, teachers, principals, counselors, and other helping professionals construct identity boundaries?
- How do they perceive boundaries within a school system? A family system? The collective school community?
- Under what conditions do teachers allow permeability of their identity boundaries to be influenced by parents, and vice versa?
- How does permeability change under stressful conditions?
- How do members of the learning community negotiate or balance their own identity and the collective identity?
- What systems of engagement are most effective over time, allowing for flexibility and change?

Further research may provide insights on these many questions.

Boundary dynamics between parents, schools, and communities are important because all members have an investment in positive youth development. Failure to encourage learning across these boundaries limits response to today's complex and ever-changing knowledge society. School principals can lead grassroots efforts toward partnership by creating opportunities for joint activities, problem solving, and dialogue in which parents and educators can learn and understand their different perspectives and seek alignment for action across boundaries. Border-crossing activities may include teacher visits to home environments, parent-teacher conferences approached from a perspective of mutuality, or structured opportunities for communities of practice between parents and educators. More research is needed to bring social capital, actionable knowledge, and networked innovation into the educational arena where they can nurture partnership formation.

Systemic change in the relationships and boundary dynamics of schools involves a call for more qualitative research within school communities. Action research influences system change via participation, self-determination, and knowledge generation (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Such participatory research aligns with the goals of creating parent-school partnerships by

- giving parents, teachers, and school leaders the shared responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating partnership practices;
- enabling them to develop a shared vision;

- taking into account each unique school culture; and
- allowing stakeholders to guide themselves from where they are toward the community they hope to become.

Indisputably, parental involvement no longer represents activities marginal to schooling young people. In fact, the integration of families into the learning and teaching process is one of the great hopes for the future of education. The knowledge society, the learning organization, and the information technology revolution represent trends that are bringing the family into the mainstream of education in ways never before experienced. These trends require expansion of current conceptual frameworks for understanding the relationship of parents to schools and schools to communities. This integration involves trial-and-error learning and nonlinear thinking from today's leaders and necessitates dialogue on the boundaries at which teaching and parenting meet to transfer knowledge across these boundaries to benefit future generations.

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