DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 614 EA 022 181

AUTHOR Ochoa, Alberto M.; Mardirosian, Vahac
TITLE Parents as Equal Collaborators of Their Children's Education: Towards Transformational Empowerment.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 40p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; *Hispanic Americans; Latin Americans; Non English Speaking; *Parent Education; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Workshops; Participative Decision Making; Public Schools; School Demography; School Effectiveness; School Holding Power; Socioeconomic Status; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS *California (San Diego)

ABSTRACT

A nonprofit, independent parent education program for parent empowerment is described in this report. Sponsored by the Parent Institute for Quality Education, the training process focuses on developing parent involvement, action, and advocacy in low income, Hispanic, and ethnolinguistic populations. The program challenges the expectation that students in these groups are destined to academic failure. Based on the problem-posing education process and experiential learning approach, a program goal is the incremental development of skills for systemic change from an initial knowledge base. Workshops address the dominant themes of parental concerns, which include student development, family interaction, school-home accountability, and school culture. Strengths of the program include its core of facilitators, commitment to parents, and respect for parents. Weaknesses are financial pressures, organizational structure, and lack of resources. Initial assessment demonstrates that low income parents are interested, willing, and socially responsible, and that a vision exists for making education a democratic, empowering institution. Tables and figures illustrate the training process and school characteristics. A list of 41 references is included. (LMI)

PARENTS AS EQUAL COLLABORATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION:

TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

By

Alberto M. Ochoa
San Diego State University
Policy Studies Department

Vahac Mardirosian
Executive Director
Parent Institute for Quality Education

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Boston, Massachusetts
April 20, 1990

DRAFT
Not to be duplicated or cited without permission

PARENTS AS EQUAL COLLABORATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

In a large urban school district, elementary school personnel find themselves discussing ways for parents to be engaged in the education of their children. Achievement scores have not improved through educational reforms. The sincere minds of school leadership ponder ways to establish strong home and school collaboration. Yet, in their tone of voice, they reflect pessimism on the commitment of low income parents to be actively engaged in parent education programs that can empower them to be teachers of their own children. The concerns expressed about parent education are reduced to the questions: "Why won't parents participate?" and "How can we get parents to participate?"

The above scenerio has been enacted in a number of school districts where parent participation is nonexistant or lacking. A description and examination of a parent education process that empowers the parent, the student, the school, and the community are the focus of this paper. Specifically, a training process that enables parents to empower themselves, be advocates for their children's education, and move them into a plan of action will be described.

In the late 1980's, the Parent Institute for Quality Education was initiated through the strong leadership of a Baptist Minister, Reverend Vahac Mardirosian, who challenged the above scenerio and myth that low income parents and/or ethnolinguistic communities are not interested in the education of their children. Working jointly with faculty of the Department of Policy Studies in Language and Cross Cultural Education, the Parent Institute for Quality Education, a nonprofit organization located in San Diego

County, has used an educational process that enables parents to pursue a plan of action for the benefit of their children. The involvement, action and advocacy of parents is the enabling process that we term "empowerment."

Experience has shown that, while there is no lack of concern on the part of parents and community members who assume collaborative responsibility with the school for improving its educational services, there is a need for parents to be empowered with skills and knowledge to enable them to give their contribution a maximum usefulness. The same can be said of school personnel concerned with providing programs that have the input and support of the school community. This paper will be helpful to school personnel, school leadership, and program planners in forming partnerships with parents that will ultimately increase the opportunities for students to succeed.

In order to provide the reader with the salient points described above, the paper has been divided into the following five sections. The first part of this paper provides a rationale for parent parcipation, the second part reviews the existing literature on parent education and Latino and ethnolinguistic communities. The third part provides a description of a parent education training process driven by the voices of parents. The fourth part operationalizes the parent education training process through a "Parent Empowerment Model." The last part provides a discussion on the organizational tensions and language of possibilities embedded in the "Parent Institute Training Process."

RATIONALE FOR PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

There is a strong tradition in the United States that public schools should be responsible to the communities they serve. Local school boards, parent teacher associations, educational agencies, and the local school community all attest to the mainstream society's acceptance of this

tradition. It fits well with society's view of itself as democratic; indeed, public education is counted among the most important of our democratic institutions (Rivera, et al., 1978). Democracy is goverment by the people in that it is the members of a community, who participate in the determination of policy for the community as a whole (Cohen, 1961).

As Aleshire (1970) and Arnstein (1969) suggest, in a democratic society the education of children requires that schools consider the following principles:

> First: educational planning should not be done without the participation of its clients.
>
> Second: parental participation involves collective decision-making, for the commitment made by the participants will motivate them toward practical implementation of planned action.
>
> Third: parental participation ensures accurate decisions, speeds up the process of change and creates active leadership. It provides a forum for the exchange of priorities.

Benellos (1971), in addressing community participation in a participatory democracy, suggests a fourth principle:

> Decision making is the process whereby people discuss, decide, plan and implement those decisions that affect their lives. This requires that the decision-making process be continuous and significant, direct, rather than through representatives, and organized around issues instead of personalities.

It stands to reason, therefore, that a growing body of judicial decisions and enacted legislation affirm the responsibility of public schools to all students. With respect to low income and/or culturally and linguistically diverse students, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, HEW May 25, 1970 Memorandum, Lau vs Nichols (1974), the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (1974), and the federally funded entitlement programs clearly require public schools to involve parents actively in the education of their children. Explicitly and implicitly, current law and state and federal mandates affirm that instructional programs must take into

consideration the concerns, the views, and the values of the communities to which these students belong. The need for students to experience school membership and community identity is a necessary condition of any effective school program and experience. In short, there are many reasons why educational program planners, administrators and implementators need to seek an open, participatory, and collaborative relationship with the low income communities of ethnically diverse students (Berla & Hall,,1989). In conceptualizing, designing and implementing a parent education program that results in well adjusted, intelligent, and academically successful students, the values and assumptions on which we base our conceptual approach and processes are of the greatest importance.

The concept of "parent involvement in education" can have many meanings. According to Laosa (1983), the term can refer to a broad range of contracts between parents and educators, and between parents and children. To address the issue of values and program assumptions, the proposed training model in this paper attempts to move away from perceiving parent education as a social pathology process (changing the behavior of parents) to one of social transformation (changing the barriers in the social context that hinders human development and parental involvement). From a policy perspective, the first approach perceives the parent/home as the problem in remedying the poor academic achievement of low income and ethnically diverse children. The premise of this approach holds that there is some deficiency in these students, and that their families and cultures must be corrected (Ascher, 1988). The second approach perceives the parents as agents of change that can transform their school community and home contexts into a setting where there is concern and support is for developing the human potential of all members in the social context. The premise of the second

approach is based on respect, responsibility, concern for the welfare of youth, and the determination to act for the good of the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON PARENT EDUCATION AND HISPANIC AND ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDENTS

While the enactment of federal and state educational legislation in the last twenty-two years, to assist schools in addressing the educational needs of low income and ethnolingustic students, has sharpened an awareness of the critical need to involve parents in the educational process, few programs have established strong collaborative relationships between the school-home-community (U.S. House of Representatives, 1988). The need for strong home-school collaboration in the case of Latino and other non-English language communities throughout the nation is based on their socioeconomic condition, which is significantly below the national averages. They are also significantly below California and national averages for elementary and high school achievement, high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation. A causal link between low educational attainment and low socioeconomic achievement is widely accepted. The Census data (1988) indicates that the ethnolinguistic population in California and the nation is increasing dramatically. The clear trend of current conditions is toward an ever increasing percentage of the population who are undereducated, underproductive, and underemployed, and who are not contributing proportionally to the national economy (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988).

It is also widely accepted that a significant factor in the low school retention rate of Hispanic and ethnolinguistic students, particularly those living in low income communities, is the lack of appropriate parental support for and participation in public school educational programs. A clear

and strongly expressed opinion, based on active experience of parents and educational support agency professionals, is that Hispanic and ethnolinguistic parents fail to participate effectively in the education of their children. The reasons given are that they lack knowledge about their children's future and do not understand the schools' expectations about their children. The parents are also unaware of the structures and functions of public education, their rights and responsibilities as parents, and school and teachers' expectations of parents and students. These problems are often exacerbated by an insufficient understanding of the English language. The majority of those expressing the significance of this problem in the education of these students are emphatic in asserting that Latino and ethnolinguistic parents are too busy dealing with their daily survival and have no time for their children. In addition, they assert that education is especially needed by those parents of children whose ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds are such that they must learn "new ways," "the American way," to succeed in U.S. society (Ascher, 1988). Yet, a vocal minority counters these assumptions on the basis of their experience and personal identification with the issues--that Hispanic and ethnolinguistic parents care about the education of their children and have a high level of awareness of their need for training to participate cooperatively with public schools (Comer, 1988; Cummins 1989; Henderson, 1987).

Educational Limitations and Socioeconomic Limitations in Low Income Communities

It is indisputable that Hispanic and ethnolinguistic youth do less well in the public schools, on average, than do mainstream youth. There is no doubt that their low academic achievements are reflected in the lower socioeconomic levels characteristic of their communities. There is a plethora of evidence documenting these two points. The following are

examples illustrative of Hispanic children, but equally applicable to other ethnolinguistic children:

-- Data collected by the California State Department of Education and analyzed by the Social Equity Technical Assistance Center at San Diego State University showed that in 1984-85, 46.3% of California's Hispanic 12th graders attended schools where the average reading scores ranked in the State's lowest 25th percentile. Only 9% of Hispanic students attended schools with average reading scores in the top 25th percentile. In contrast, in that year, 34.1% of Anglo 12th graders were in schools where the average reading score was in the top 25th percentile and only 11.8 % were in schools ranked in the lowest 25th percentile. The contrast remains if we look at scores for 3rd or 6th graders, or if we examine math instead of reading scores (Espinosa and Ochoa, 1990).

-- The U.S. Department of Commerce (1988) reports that 83% of U.S. 18-19 year olds graduated from high school. "Whites" did slightly better than the national rate with 88% graduating. Hispanics, with 62% graduating, did the poorest of the groups compared (White, Black, Hispanic).

-- Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an employment to population ratio of .41 for Hispanic youth aged 16-24, compared to a .67 ratio for their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988).

-- The National Council on Educational Statistics reported that 8.5% of 16-24 year old Hispanics were unemployed, compared to 5.8% unemployment for 16-24 year old Whites. The unemployment rate for

Hispanic high school dropouts was 21.1% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988).

-- The Census reports a median family income of $20,306 for Hispanic people, a national median family income of $31,610 for Whites (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988).

That a causal relationship exists between poverty and low educational achievement-- and, conversely, between economic success and educational attainment--has been maintained in countless studies and dissertations (Nathan, 1986; Harris & Associates, 1987). It is a supported article of faith in the U.S. that education is the key toward upward social and economic mobility.

Demographics and School Holding Power

How large a portion of its population can a society tolerate as undereducated, underemployed, and undercompensated? This question cannot be shunned if we recognize that these objectives apply to a rapidly expanding share of the U.S. people.

In the case of Hispanic and ethnolinguistic communities, the 1988 census reports show that the Hispanic population is growing nationally faster than any other ethnic group. In 1980 to 1988, the Hispanic civilian population increased by 34% or about 5 million people. In 1988, California's Hispanics amounted to 33.9% of the nation's total, while their numbers in the State have grown from 3.1 to 6.5 million--an increase of 109% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1988). While Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group, their school dropout rate exceeds 45%. Of the 55% that graduate, 10% have skills sifficient to pursue a college education (Ochoa et al., 1987).

The demographic reality must affect the way we view the public school system's failure to retain and educate ethnolinguistic youth. As their

numbers grow, it is clear that their lack of school success ceases to be--if ever it was--their problem alone. The cost to the state and nation of their lost economic and social productivity is incalculable. The cost of social programs, law enforcement and other "remedies" to the social effects of poverty and high unemployment are already astronomical. Demographic reality predicts the steady rise of those costs if the education of Latino/Hispanic youth is not substantially improved; as those costs rise, they will be borne by a shrinking percentage of the population.

Opinions may vary as to the best means of improving the quality of education, but it is clear that no program can benefit students who will not participate in it. Public schools' inability to retain Latino/Hispanic youth, particularly in high school, is critical. For 45% of all Hispanics to be without a high school education and with 22% of Hispanic high school dropouts unemployed, this is an unacceptable social situation.

Parent Support and School Effectiveness

Both critics and defenders of the public school system agree that the lack of communication, cooperation, and participatory effort between schools and parents of low income youth is a critical factor negatively affecting students' success and schools' holding power (Henderson, 1985; Lightfoot, 1978). Students enter school from a cultural background different from that of the school. They often come without any exposure to mainstream values and expectations assumed by the school curriculum. These students have a different socialization background than what is expected by their teachers and school personnel. Furthermore, a significant number of Hispanic and ethnolinguistic students have a dominant language other than English. If they are to negotiate successfully the door to social and economic

independence, the students are expected to identify with school's expectations, learn its language, compete successfully in its assigned tasks, and identify their future well-being with school success.

For such students, a bridge must be built linking the home and the school. Without a bridge, there is only a chasm. However, a bridge must have its footings solidly on each bank. It must be built consciously and cooperatively by parents and educators who share understanding, concerns, goals, and expectations of and for the children who are their joint responsibility (Brice nd McLaughlin, 1987; Rich, 1989).

The research literature has begun to document that parents can do much to prepare their children for school, to support their efforts in school, and to reinforce students' positive valuation of schooling. Parents have a right, in the local school system, to a voice in and a review of the way schools meet their children's needs. Where parents consistently fulfill these roles in cooperation with the schools, their children do well, and drop-out rates are low (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Henderson, 1987; Rich, 1987).

The relationship between parent participation with schools and school effectiveness is widely accepted in the many "special," "compensatory" and "remedial" school programs mandated or provided by state and federal agencies. Yet, too often, these programs have failed in their intent and, often, program evaluations have suggested that the one critical program fault was the failure to accomplish the parent-participation goals (Ascher, 1988). A strong parent-school involvement program would stress that the parents be actively involved to ensure a relevant and meaningful education for their children.

Problems in School/Parent Cooperation

The gulf between public schools and the parents and communities of low

income and ethnically diverse students is a reality that the present generation of parents and school personnel have experienced. This is not the place to examine causes, but to identify obstacles to a solution. Regretably, we must recognize that there is a strong expectation among public school educators that low income parents will not fulfill their necessary role as collaborators in their children's education (Epstein and Dauber, 1989). This is expressed in studies that describe the conceptual and social mismatch of experience that low income children bring to school. It is also expressed in the often heard explanations from teachers and principals that Latino and low income parents do not care about their children's schooling (Henderson, 1987). Perhaps it is reflected in the finding by Massey, Scott and Dornbush (1975, p 11) who "discovered that contrary to some beliefs, poor and minority children are constantly being told that they are doing well when they are not, that their work is satisfactory when it is not, and that they are progressing when they are not." Not only are the students deluded but so are their parents. Consequently, the public often sees that ethnically diverse and low income students with passing grades cannot function at work or in college.

In recent years, national educational conferences have sponsored seminars for educators, administrators, and educational policy makers on parent participation and the need for restructuring of schools. Concerns expressed there about parent participation have once again reduced themselves essentially to the questions: "Why won't parents participate?" and "How can we get parents to participate?"

Parent Empowerment

Goodson and Hess (1978) and Rich (1985) in their research on parent involvement, differentiate parent education into four types, each with an

overriding assumption as to the role of the parent:

1. parents as more effective role models
2. parents as better parents in educating their children
3. parents as supporting resources for the school
4. parents as policymakers

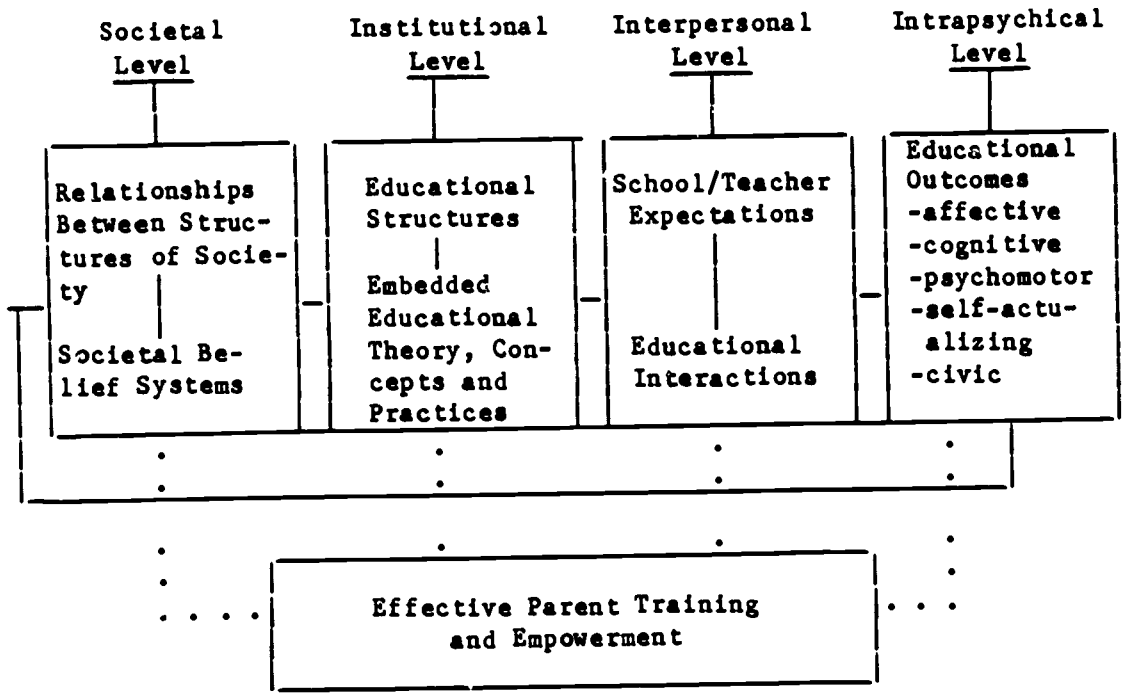
Such parent education sees parents as active participants and not as passive followers of their children education. Suggested is a training approach designed to provide parents with knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to support the cognitive and social development of all students--for the good of the community. Specifically, the goals are to enable parents:

- to be effective teachers of their own children
- to be equal collaborators of their children's development, and
- to influence quality educational excellence for all children

Such a parent training empowerment model calls for low-income and ethnically diverse parents to be trained for achieving positive support and collaborative participation with public schools. Underlying the approach to parent training is a conviction that life success requires a conscious understanding of certain sociopolitical structural relationships (Persell, 1977) as they are articulated in our society.

This structural relationships calls for an understanding of how social beliefs and values shape and influence school curricula and educational policy. In turn, policy and values operationalized in the form of institutional practices of schooling influence the academic achievement of different groups and their career expectations. These educational practices form socialization experiences that shape educational and occupational aspirations, which influence the actual, academic attaintment, or educational outcomes of students (Giroux, 1983; Persell, 1977). Thus, the long term goal of effective parent training and empowerment is to demystify the societal,

institutional, interpersonal and intrapsychical relationships to enable parents to understand and be proactive in securing educational practices that nurture the development of all students to be responsible participants in shaping our democracy. These are shown in their simplest form in the following schema:



The present reality suggests that there is a gulf that exists between public schools and the low income communities. In its broadest sense, this distance is a cultural and a political one (Chavkin, 1989). The past, including the past fifteen years of stepped-up school activity, has shown that the school system itself is limited in its ability to provide the training needed for parents. Our experience has been that much deeper and more lasting results occur when parent training takes place in the context of parent/community mobilization to exercise a democratic right to participate in sharing the education of the community's children (Harris and Associates, 1987).

The research on school-parent collaboration (Thelen, 1967; Swap, 1987;

and Ascher, 1988) suggests that the most effective results will be obtained by low income communities which institutionalize the training of their members to support and participate with the public schools as an element within their local cultures. This approach promises a self-supporting system that will not be perceived as alien or outside-imposed, but rather a culture-owned means of participation in a multicultural society.

DESCRIPTION OF PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING PROCESS

While the school effectiveness movement has identified five conditions of an effective school --1) strong instructional leadership, 2) an instructional focus on basic skills, 3) an orderly climate with the focus on learning, 4) high expectations for student achievement, and 5) frequent monitoring of student progress-- it has avoided the role of parent participation. The literature on effective schools (Nye, 1989) allude to the importance of active parents and interested citizen groups in establishing a positive home-community-school linkage.

To address this gap, a parent education process external to the governance policies of school districts has been undertaken in San Diego County. The reason for choosing to seek this approach is the anxiety on the part of school administrators that any emphasis on the role of parents in increasing student achievement will detract from the responsibility for education that must be placed on the school. Another reason was based on the extremely slow response on the part of school personnel to implement parent leadership training (Mexican American Advisory Committee, 1987) and recognize the concerns of parents.

The Parent Leadership Training Institute was created to listen to the voices of low income parents (Giroux, 1983) and specifically Latino/Hispanic

and ethnolinguistic parents. In the development of an approach that would address the silent voices of the community, the following assumptions about the community and its sociopolitical context were recognized:

1. that people have different learning styles which are composed of varying combinations of four basic processes: experience, reflection, conceptualization, and affirmation of reality. Consequently, educational activities should contain elements of all four processes.

2. that people learn more easily in situations of mutual respect, cooperation, and trust. Thus, the affective aspects of individuals cannot be divorced from their intellectual and cognitive growth.

3. that people learn when the subject matter is immediately relevant to their existence.

4. that people learn when they set their own goals and actively participate in the decision making process in the learning environment. In such activities, individuals are the subjects of the learning process.

5. that being part of humanity and the act of learning both involve the active transformation (change) of the environment.

6. that people use their fullest potential only in dialogical situations.

7. that each person is a human being filled with a myriad of infinite experiences from which all can learn.

To incorporate the above assumptions into an educational process, the work and research of Paulo Freire (1973) and Fals Borda (1972) were incorporated into a training framework that formed the working dynamics of the Parent Institute for Quality Education. The training framework is illustrated in figure 1 and begins with the school inviting a team of facilitators (Parent Institute) to dialogue with a core of parents, and document their voices. This invitation comes from the school leadership that is committed to seeing that:

- parents are effective teachers of their own children
- parents are collaborators in their children's development, and
- parents are agents for quality education.

Given the organizational commitment to actualize the above goals, the facilitators over a period of three to five weeks establish dialogue with parents. This dialogue becomes the voice of the parent community through the identification of needs, wants, and concerns. What follows is a listing of issues that are clustered into generative themes. These themes become the focus of their training workshops. Selected themes are developed into workshops that provide enabling experiences for dialogue, reflection, conceptualization, practice, internalization, and action. Thus, each workshop addresses a concern or issue identified by the parent community. Embedded in each workshop format are problem posing activities that lead to the identification of the problem, conditions contributing to the problem and solutions, and alternative options for addressing the problem and/or concerns.

Problem posing education, the pedagogical approach used in each workshop experience, is illustrated in figure II. The problem posing education process takes the approach of the experiential learning cycle. Such approach is composed of a series of phases: actual experience (workshop and activities), reflection about the experience (analysis of conditions), conceptualization (understanding of issues), praxis (practice applied activities), and internalization (personal growth). This approach provides

FIG I

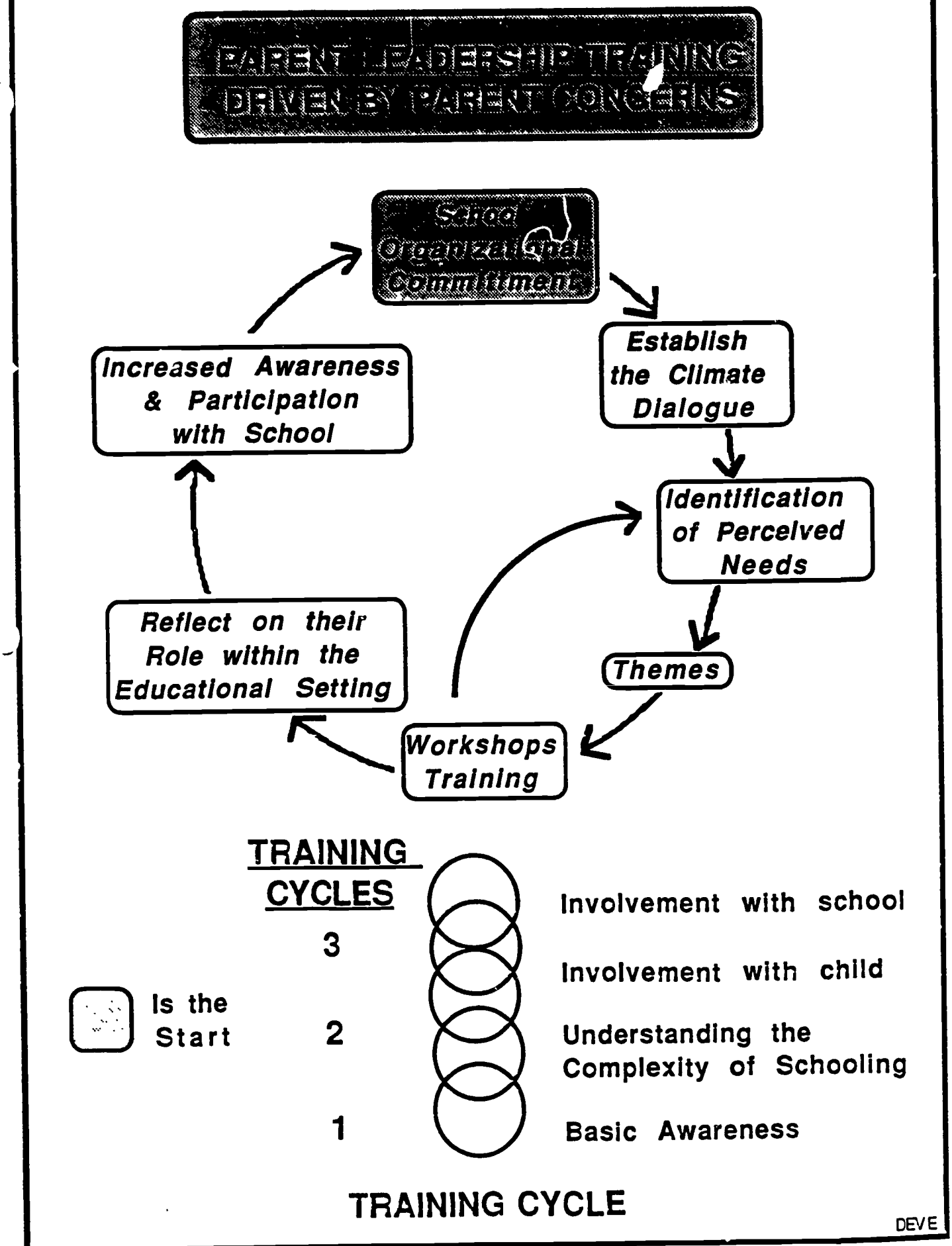
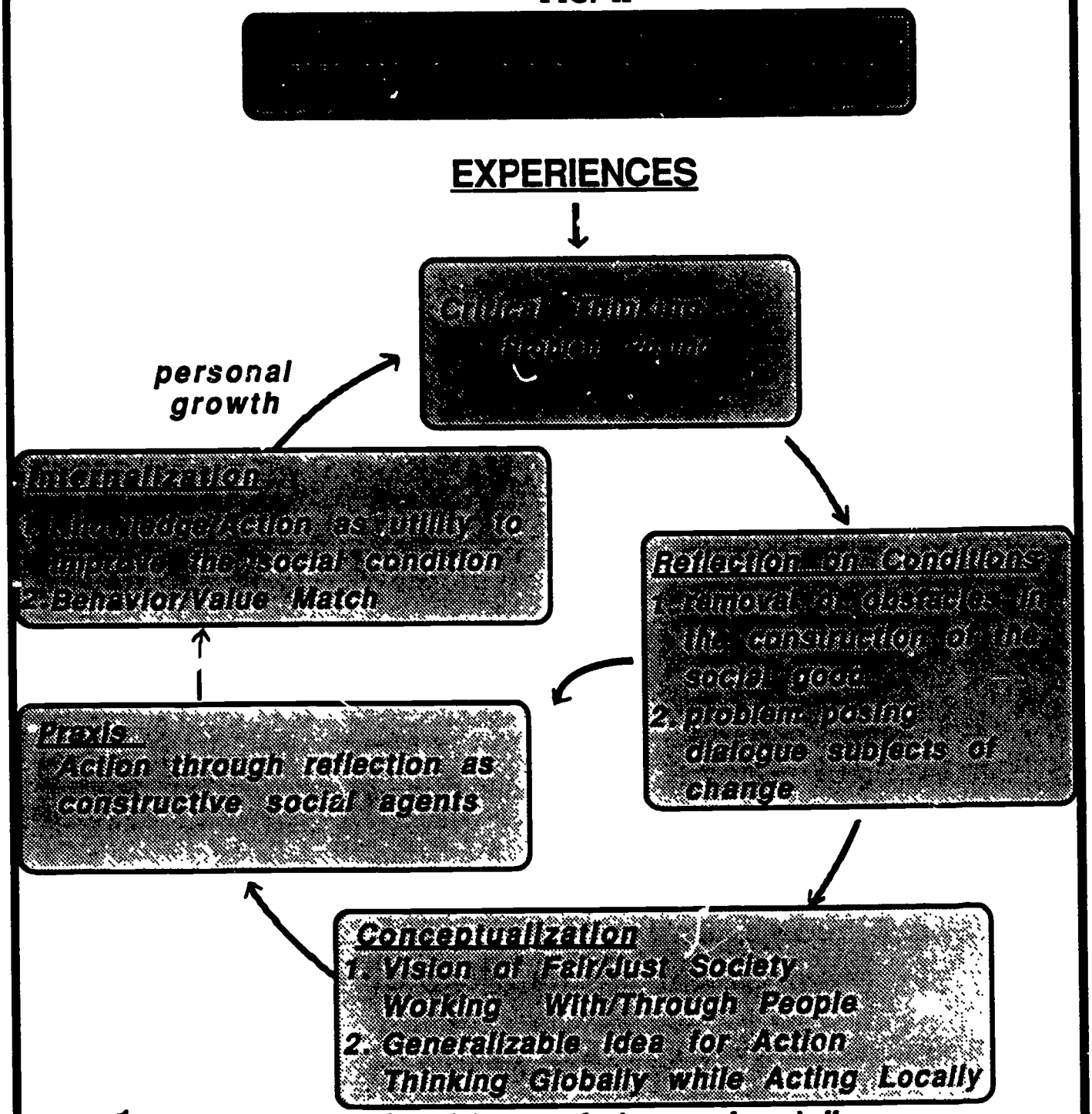

PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING
DRIVEN BY PARENT CONCERNS
School Organizational Commitment
Establish the Climate Dialogue
Identification of Perceived Needs
Themes
Workshops Training
Reflect on their Role within the Educational Setting
Increased Awareness & Participation with School
TRAINING CYCLES
3
2
1
Is the Start
Involvement with school
Involvement with child
Understanding the Complexity of Schooling
Basic Awareness
TRAINING CYCLE
DEVE

FIG. II



1. "cosas en sí" (things of themselves) "cosas para nosotros" (for the collective we)

Source: * Freire, Paulo. Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: The Seabury Press, 1973.
* Fals Borda, Orlando. El Problema de Como Investigar la Realidad para Transformarla-por la Praxis. Bogotá, Colombia: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 4th ed., 1972.

DEV E-1

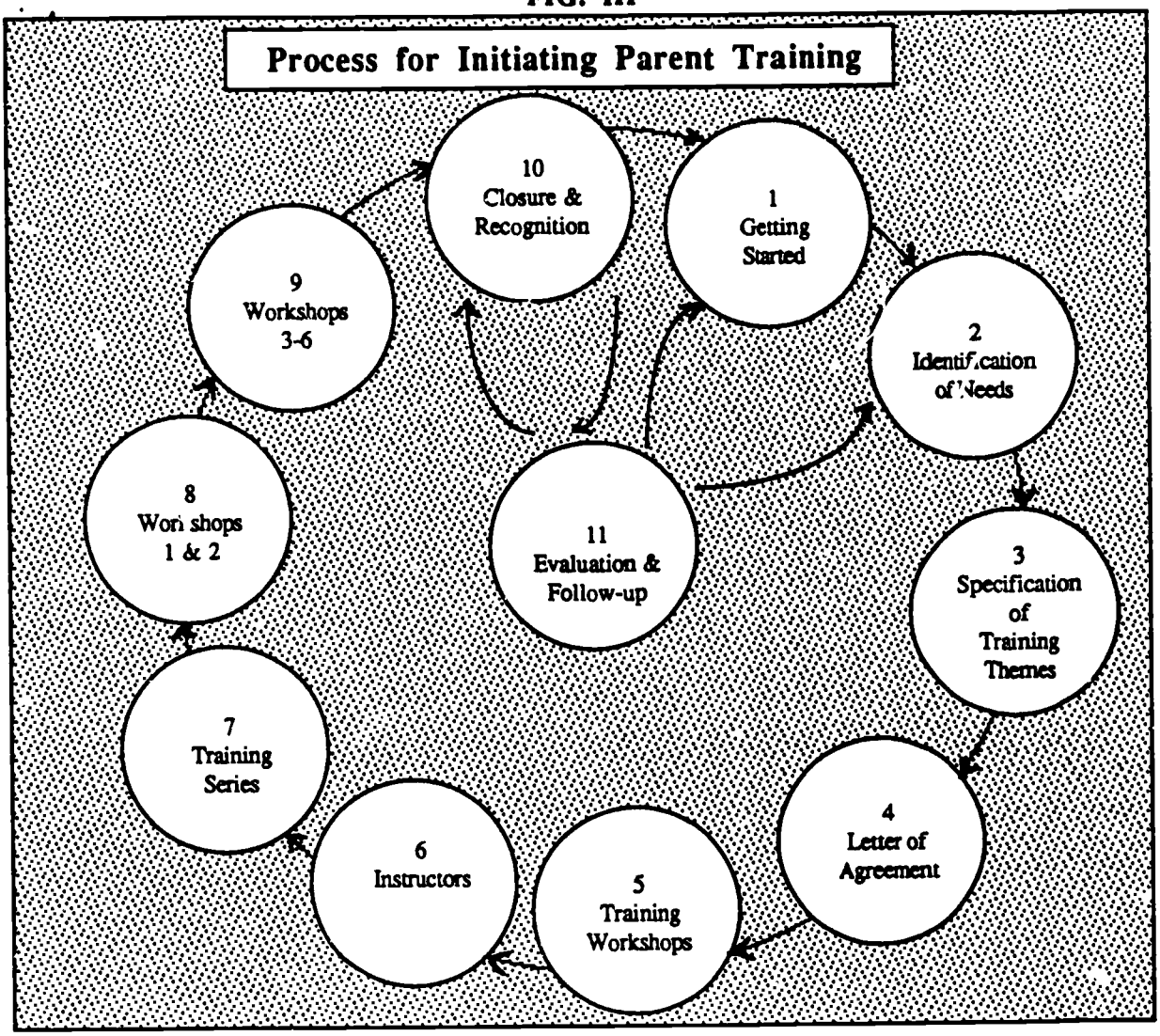
the process used in each training session. Such approach has proven effective in the growth and development of parent participants and of the members of the Parent Institute training team. Furthermore, the training activities vary from session to session to make the dialogue dynamic, collaborative, and of personal interest to the parents.

Process for Initiating Parent Institute Training

Historically, low income and/or ethnolinguistic parents are not comfortable in feeling a sense of belonging with the schools their children attend. The social distance between the school and the home is part of the product of the bureaucratization of educational policy, and cultural distances between themselves and school professionals. Furthermore, school practices are justified by educators who claim an expertise that working class and poor parents cannot match (Bastain, et al., 1987).

To build a community of parents who undertake training through the Parent Institute, culturally based communication is established by facilitators who are members of the ethnic community. Specific person to person communication is initiated, nurtured through phone-calls and a series of personal letters inviting the parents to dialogue and participate in the training. Figure III illustrates a flow chart used to plan each training series with a given school community. Initial recognition of the parent as a co-equal in the education of their children is a paramount practice that permeates throughout each training and culminates with a special graduation ceremony. In this final training ceremony the superintendent of the school district and/or the president of the college/university are invited to present a certificate of recognition to each parent. This event also provides the parent with a personal linkeage with school authority and leadership. As the organizational commitment on the part of the school

FIG. III



Outcomes

1. Establish interest/need at school site
2. Community meeting to identify themes of interest/concern/issues (2-4 meetings)
3. Selection of themes
4. School-institute agreement to collaborate
   - Identification of parents
   - Letters/phone calls
   - Registration
   - Facilitators
   - Child care
   - Facilities
   - Closing ceremony
   - Dates/time
5. Development of training workshops on selected themes
6. Identification and selection of instructors and training
7. Delivery of Training workshops
   - Instructors' materials
   - Weekly review
8. Parental Contact: Ongoing communication & phone calls
9. Parent contacts: Community networking
10. Closure of training: Evaluation & Ceremony/Certificate
11. Follow-up

persists, this training cycle is repeated.

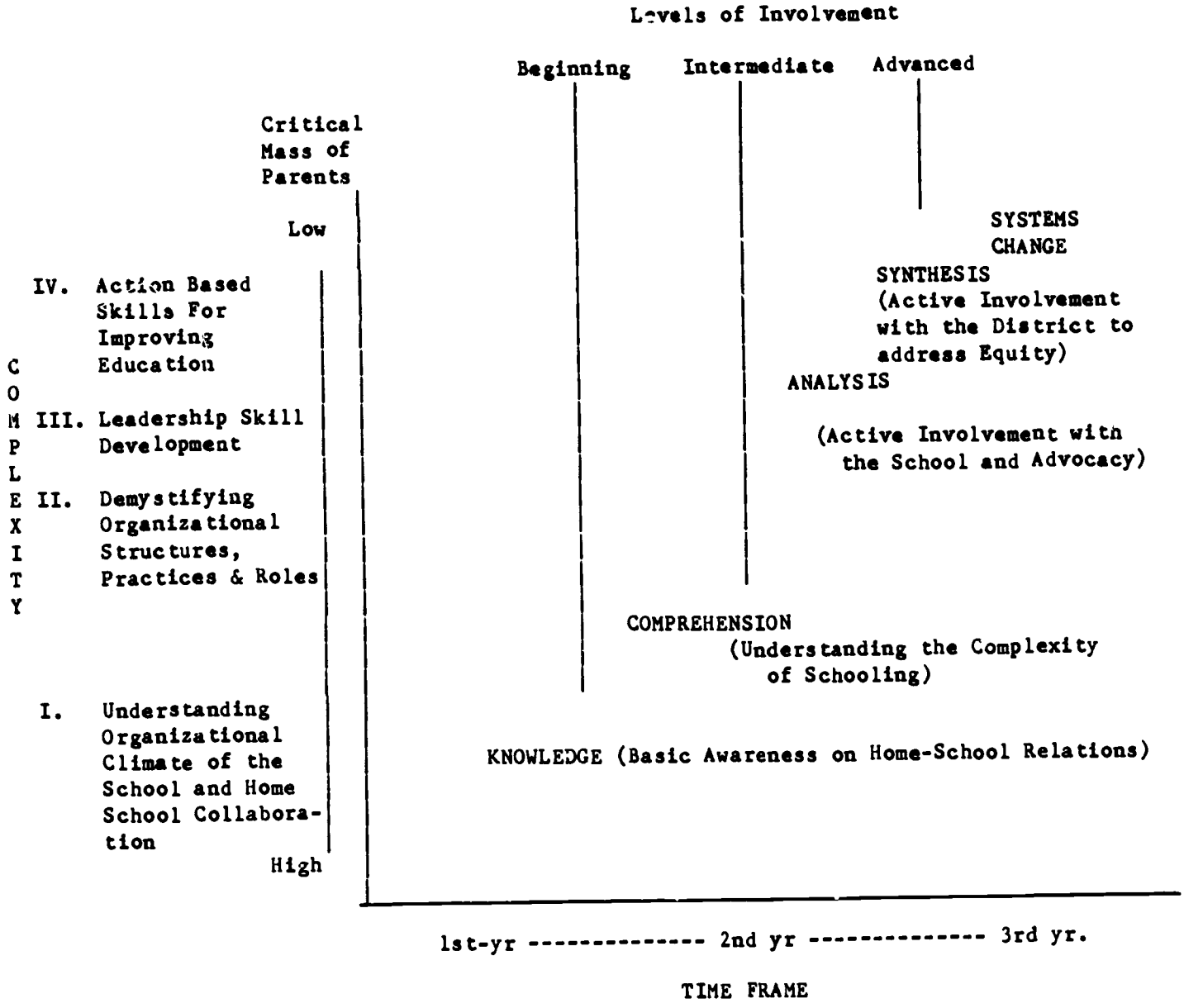
Long Term Training Goals

In over a two-year period the Parent Institute for Quality Education has trained over 2,800 parents, who at a minimum have participated in four thematic issues. The vision of such training is to nurture the development of parents from a level of understanding their role and advocacy in the education of their children to a level in which they become the trainers of other parents. Figure IV illustrates the long term training agenda of the Parent Institutes with respect to areas of parent empowerment. Level I training focuses on parent issues that directly impact home-school collaboration, level II training focuses on demystifying school structures and practices, level III training focuses on leadership skills development, and level IV training focuses on action research for improving schooling for low income and ethnolinguistic students. The levels move from a knowledge base to system change skills acquisition level. As the level of personal commitment increases, it is projected that at each level the cadre of parents will decrease in terms of numbers. While a large critical mass are expected to complete level I and II training, a much smaller number are expected to participate in level III and IV trainings.

Parent training level III and IV is foreseen as occurring in the context of community action as parents seek to develop leadership skills and establish a participatory relationship with public schools. The dynamic problem posing approach is also used in these levels of training. The training is also conducted within the parents' own community structures, a nonthreatening environment in which questioning, debate, discussion and free self-expression can take place--an enviroment in which self-actualizing choices are possible.

Figure IV

PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROCESS



Trainers

Parents are trained in groups of 20 to 30 to allow for interaction, personalization, dialogue, and activities yielding low anxiety and free flow of communication.

The trainers meet weekly to review their workshop materials. Trainers are selected based on their experience and sensitivity in working and training parents, as well as in their ability to deliver workshops in Spanish, English, and other languages. In their review of each of the training workshops, the trainers address process, clarity and desired concept attainment, under each theme, for each training session. The director or coordinator of each parent institute training series is responsible for facilitating all aspects of the training--scheduling, materials, training of trainers, documentation, and evaluation of sessions. Each workshop has suggested support materials and readings for the trainers to review as the support knowledge base on the theme under discussion.

Climate of Instruction

In order to facilitate learning and a climate for sharing ideas, the instructor provides learning experiences that lead to the examination of key concepts. In addition, the instructor facilitates interaction among participants in the discussion and activities of the workshop. It is assumed that each parent participant brings to each meeting a wealth of knowledge and resources. The parent group is expected to pool their experience and examine the ideas and concepts of each workshop through the eyes and views of more than one parent.

Format of Learning Theory

Significant learning takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the parents as having relevance for their own purposes. Learning that,

involves a change in the perception of one's self is threatening and tends to be resisted. However, when threats to one's self are low, the parent makes use of opportunities to learn in order to obtain self-enhancement. Learning is facilitated when learners participate in the learning process: choosing their own direction, helping to discover learning resources, formulating their own problems, deciding their own course of action, living with the consequences of each of these choices, then significant learning is maximized.

Mode of Delivery

Each workshop follows a common approach and/or strategies. The workshop begins with a common structure for the given theme being addressed. A workshop period consists of ninety to one hundred-eighty minutes and uses diverse teaching methods and approaches that are appropriate for the given theme. The workshops are delivered in the target languages of the school communities, e.g., Spanish for Spanish dominant/proficient parents.

The first session begins with an overview presentation of the materials prepared for the training. The workshops involve small group discussions, critical incidents, and question-and-answer sessions. A field assignment (homework) is given, which is due in the next session. The assignment, for example, can consist of gathering facts and information at the local level pertaining to the theme. Approaches to gathering the information and possible problems are discussed during the initial sessions. The purpose of the fieldwork assignment is two-fold:

1. it makes the topic immediately relevant by relating it to specific applications in actual home/community settings;

2. it gives the participants an opportunity to begin to develop and utilize their skills at working in the educational system, using tasks of graduated difficulty.

Between the first and the second session, participants do the homework assignments, working alone or in teams of two. Some assignments can be done by phone, while others will require site visits during the latter part of the training. The following describes a homework assignment:

> For the "How the School Systems Works" topic, find out if the local library has any books on local history which would tell you how much the school has grown in the last 20 years. Find out what the total budget of the local district is, how much federal aid they get, and how much of the budget goes to teachers' salaries, curriculum, staff development, facilities, etc. Find out whether school board members are elected at large or from specific geographical areas, and which neighborhoods or areas are now represented on the Board.

In the follow-up session, participants present, share, and discuss the information they have gathered. There is role playing of situations encountered in the field. Participants role play the value positions of various role groups that impact the situation, in order to gain understanding of all sides. Overall, 3 to 6 themes are covered in a series of training workshops.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING PROCESS

The Parent Institute has trained over 2,820 parents in its first two years. A key factor, that differentiates such training from other similar approaches, has been its commitment to listen to the voices of parents and to hear them identify areas of greatest concern to them, without placing a value judgment on their identified concerns. Through the problem posing education process and experiential learning approach, the goal of the facilitators (trainers) is to link their voices with the concept of transformation--enabling parents to take responsibility and action to create win-win problem solving situations-- enabling them to work with the school, while advocating for their children's education.

Overview of School Communities

In its two years (fall 1987 to fall 1989) of parent training, the Parent Institute has worked with twenty-three school communities in three school districts, eighteen being elementary schools, four junior highs, and one high school. During this period, only three elementary schools have undertaken level II training for parents. At each of tnese school sites, the school leadership invited the Parent Institute to undertake parent training at limited cost to the school site. Funding, primarly from private foundations and the American Baptist Churches, has provided for staff assistance, phones, postage, travel, equipment and duplication of materials directly related to the preparation, delivery, and evaluation of each training session. External funding has been intentional in order for the Parent Institute to avoid being perceived as a vehicle of a school district for placating the voices of its parents.

The characteristics of the school communities involved with the Parent Institute have the following profile:

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Type of School	#	SES	ADA Range	Ethnic Diversity	Achievement CTBS %	No. Parents Trained	Single Parent	School Organizational Support
Elementary School	19	Low Income	750	88%	34 (5th Gr)	2,406	50%	Supportive of Parent Training at Level I, Some at Level II
Jr. High School	4	Low Income	975	93%	23 (9th Gr.)	373	45%	Supportive of Parent Training at Level I
High School	1	Low/ Middle	1,500	42%	61 (11th Gr.)	41	33%	Limited support of Parent Training at Level I

These schools are predominantly at the elementary level, they are being administered by administrators who initiated contact with the Parent Institute. Eight of the principals are Hispanic, and fifteen White, with 83% of the principals being female.

In many of these schools, school staff perceived the goals of the Parent Institute as far reaching. The majority of these schools have a history of very low parent participation. Training in each of the school communities was projected to provide at least 100 parents graduates. To reach such a number, 250 parents were registered to participate, with 50% attending the initial training, and with 40% completing at least four of six training themes to graduate. The general skepticism of school personnel about the goal of the Parent Institute is best expressed by a school secretary who stated:

> "I have been at this school for over fifteen years, and we have tried to involve parents. You (Parent Institute) will be lucky to get twenty parents, so don't have high hopes."

In addition, these schools are large, over-crowded, scoring at the first and second quartile in standarized tests. Also, as many as 50% of the homes have single parents, who are low income. Lastly, over 80% of the students are ethnically diverse--predominatly Latino/Hispanic.

Dominant Thematic Issues

Using the parent leadership training process (see figure I), collectively, over one thousand concerns were documented in the 23 school communities. These concerns range from individual issues (pertaining to family problems), to issues dealing with school concerns, to district practices. During the initial two year period, the following twenty-four themes have predominated in the 23 school communities. These themes can be clustered into four areas: Student Development/Growth, Home-Family Interaction,

School-Home Accountability, and School Culture/Community Influences. The themes are:

Student Development Growth
1. Understanding Child Development
2. Learning and Motivation
3. Bilingual Education and Language Development
4. Adolescent Growth and Parenting
5. Career Choices and College
6. Self-Esteem
7. Sex Education and Personal Growth

Home-Family Interaction
1. Harmony Between Child-Home-School
2. Communication and Discipline
3. Assertive Behavior
4. Harmony and Conflict in the Home
5. Physical and Emotional Abuse

School-Home Accountability
1. Parent Rights
2. Student Achievement and Home-School Collaboration
3. At Risk Students and Underachievement
4. School System as an Organization
5. School Curricula and Teacher Skills
6. School Climate and Equal Treatment

School Culture/Community
1. School Accountability
2. Cross-Cultural Communication
3. Drugs and Alcohol
4. Community Social Services
5. Coping with Stress
6. Racism

Embedded in the twenty-four themes are parental voices wanting information, needing to network with other parents, and desiring to problem solve their concerns. A sample of their voices are documented as follows: In the case of home communication and discipline a parent expressed this concern:

> I am aware of my responsibility to guide my child, yet often I cannot control my temper when my child fails to follow my directions. Out of anger, I say things that I don't mean and my children model my behavior. How do other parents deal with their anger and discipline at home?

With respect to harmony between child - home and school, parent voices seek guidance in directing their growth. A parent attending level II training

expressed this change:

> Before attending these workshops my husband would question my work with the school. I began to tell him what happens when we are not involved. After dealing with our differences...now I volunteer him if there is something he can do when he is not working... and he'll come. My children are doing better and we understand (comprendemos) our roles as parents better.

In the area of harmony between child-home-school the division of labor is often male dominated. As parents interact, strategies for dealing with home conflict are exchanged. One parent describes the type of conflict she faced as her involvement with the school increased:

> From the beginning my husband expected me to do everything for him if I worked with the school. He would tell me that I had not cooked dinner on time, or finished cleaning the house, or taken care of our home. I felt a lot of pressure from him. But you know what, I felt good that I was helping my children and the school! Because I felt that what I was doing was important, slowly, my husband changed and "vio la luz," he saw the light.

With regard to school accountability and how the school informs parents about their child's education, parent voices document the need for them to know about the quality of education their children receive. A married couple explained:

> Whenever we went to open house the teachers of our children would tell us "she is doing fine," "he needs to pay more attention, but he is a good boy." Then in the fourth and fifth grade we find out he or she is not reading at grade level. Why? We were told they were doing fine! We come to the school to find out what we can do, but they don't explain what is wrong. We have to get angry to receive attention. Why (por que)?

In reference to school climate and equal treatment, parent voices express a sense of disempowerment and unequal treatment because they are not English proficient. Such dialogue voiced concern about how their children were treated, if they themselves felt unequal. A parent explained:

> Often when I go to my children's school, I feel very uncomfortable (sin ganas) because I cannot speak English. As an adult I can negotiate in my language very well, but when you are limited in English you have difficulty expressing yourself, I feel stupid (tonta). And I don't like the way people translate. They only give you a few words. I want to be bilingual so they stop treating me as a second class person (ciudadana), "y van a ver," they'll see.

With respect to how the school system works, parent voices express their respect for education and are often frustated by educators who perceive this respect for the school as apathy or as passiveness. A parent explains:

> Our parents don't understand the "system!" They place too much faith on what the school is doing. They respect teachers too much! That's OK, but they need to see that things are not OK. Why do we have so many students reading, writing and computing below grade level? We cannot tolerate such a situation. Our children deserve a better future. We (somos) are tax payers!

In the area of drug abuse in the community, at a school community, drug dealing was abusive. Working with school leadership, parents organized to confront the situation. A parent describes the situation.

> We were under seige (nos tenian atrapados) and in fear. We said enough (basta). We could no longer allow drug dealings around our school. Our children were walking in fear, we were afraid to work with law enforcement. Our parents united and formed a community "watch dog" committee. The police was convinced to provide extra assistance. Slowly, we are overcoming drugs; and our children can now play.

Lastly, as an example of parent voices, in the area of assertive behavior, parents wanted strategies for dealing with intimidation by school personnel, in their dealings with social service agencies, or even in their communication with their spouses. What is aggressive behavior? What is passive behavior? What is responsible (assertive) behavior? These issues they wanted to study, in order for them to be more effective in communicating. A parent, participating in level II training, explained:

> The way people talk to me, often aggressively (sin respeto) or in an abusive manner, makes me uncomfortable and makes me mad. If I need information or want a question answered, people are rude and unattentive (sin atencion) to me, because of how I look (prieta) or how I speak. How do I deal with such behavior and responsibly demand my rights?

Parent empowerment is a process, it is dialogue, it is problem solving with and through people, it is expressing one's opinion, it is taking action on issues that negate the right to equal participation, choice, and quality education for all childern. Hampden-Turner (1975) refers to these type of behaviors as increasing the quality of one's perception, one's self-esteem and competence to invest one's energy in improving the human condition. The Parent Institute is committed to this empowerment process and in the improvement of the quality of life of children, their right to competence and equal particapation in our democracy.

ORGANIZATIONAL TENSIONS AND THE LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITIES

Language of Possibilities

Hidden in the voices of parents is their desire for alternatives, the language of possibilities, in creating responsive democratic schooling. Such schooling calls for the right to informed knowledge, individual freedom, choice, equal opportunity, and equal participation (Benellos Roussopolus, 1971; Pearl, 1989).

The initial work of the Parent Institute has produced a language of possibilities through active parent involvement with school communities. Such activity has also produced tension, the tension of possibilities, alternatives, and desire for change.

Among the most salient issues that have arisen as parents exert their voices and basic rights as advocates of their children and community are

their following concerns:

1. Tension in communication and Negotiations. As parents have become more actively involved with the schools and their behavior has become more assertive in dealing and communicating with school personnel, tension in communicating styles and what constitutes home and school accountability is an issue of concern. Preparing the school community to perceive and address these behavior as positive and as part of the dialogue between the school and the home is an imperative task for the Parent Institute.
2. Tension in school control. As parents exert their voices and express their concerns (e.g., school facilities) to the school leadership and school board, sociopolitical and organizational sparks are noticeable as school site leadership are requested to control their communities. Parent training directed at parents taking responsibility for the well-being of their child and community will generate positive tension that, if addressed responsibly, should lead to win-win situations and not a win-lose relationship.
3. Tension in parents as advocates. As parents become advocates for their children and their community, such behavior is often perceived as an intrusion into the normalacy of a classr om or school site. Rather, the intrusion should be treated as leverage for developing a bridge between the parents, teacher, student and administrator, producing one force that has the same objective -- developing the potential of the students and their career opportunities.
4. Tension in parents as co-equal partners. As parents focus their concerns on their children's development and raise questions about their academic and social skills, parents express that they are

not accepted as coequal partners by school personnel. Facilitating acceptance from the professional educational community that low income parents are co-equals is a social and political attitude that must be addressed.

5. Tension in systems change. As parents articulate problems, conditions, and solutions away from a deficit perspective (people blaming) to a perspective of systems change. Such approach will increase parent-school-community tension and will require dialogue that moves away from people blaming each other for disempowering conditions to an ecological operational approach based on the involvement of families, social agencies, the school and problem solving.

6. Tension in school organizational support.

   As parents become a force in their school communities, the organizational commitment and actual support to provide parents with on-going training diminishes. Few school communities initiate follow-up training after the Parent Institute completes its initial work. Parent empowerment is an on-going process that requires faith, respect, patience, and work.

From a different critical perspective, the members of the Parent Institute met in the fall of 1989, in a retreat format, to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in its work to empower parents to be advocates of their children and community. The results of the retreat, using a force field analysis approach, yielded the following issues:

Strengths of Parent Institute

Person to person
Empowerment
Break the myth that Hispanic community is passive
Cultural sensitivity
Consistent, dedicated/leadership
Activism-results-driven

Represents-ideology (board & staff)
Parent-centered
Outside school system
Method of work with schools/parents
Safe to express opinion
Mutual support
Focus on common problems rather than differences
Self-help reliance
Curriculum driven by parent input
Facilitates relationships, convicting changing attitudes
Program responsive to involve parents
Recognizes strength of parents
Respect for parents
Strong care of instructors
Multilingual
Number of volunteers
Key school principal involvement
Parent recruitment method and follow up
Positively perceived by parents-community
Sensitizes school district
Put parent involvement on the agenda
Attention to detail/system

Weaknesses of Parent Institute

Lack of 5 year plan
Need to multiply leadership
Dependency on in-kind contributions
Need for diversified funding
Dependency on key volunteers for organizational operations
Inadequate core funding
Issue of program institutionalization
Organization policies and procedures
No store front for parents
Issue of membership organization
Need office space
Need equipment
Problem maintaining graduate contact
Parent family/problems (e.g., health, drugs, abuse, etc.)
Need grater organizational capacity to follow up and return to schools
Lack of adequate child care at school sites

Among its greatest strengths are the core of facilitators, its strong commitment to parents, and its sensitivity to respecting and nurturing parents. Among its weaknesses are the constant pressure to obtain external funding to operate Parent Institute, its organizational structure, and lack of resources to address the complexity of social, economic, psychological issues and problems that are interrelated with the quality of life of the

families participating in training.

While the first two years of work by the Parent Institute for Quality Education have been demanding and promising, such endeavors have challenged those involved with the Institute to continue to work with parents, teachers, students, and administrators in problem posing education. Our initial work and research has convinced us that not only are low income parents interested, willing, and socially responsible for improving the quality of education provided to their children, but that a vision exists for making schooling a truly democratic and empowering institution. While our work has been exploratory and convincing to many educators, it remains insufficient and incomplete as we prepare to address a number of structural and social tensions that disempower children. In the words of Reverand Vahac Mardirosian, "low students performance is due to neglect, not the child's ability." We increase our committment to the task that no child should fail to receive an education, as the schools in the urban centers throughout our nation become majority ethnically diverse, and for the most part low income.

REFERENCES

Aleshire, R. A. (1970). "Planning and Citizen Participation--Costs and Benefits and Approaches." Urban Affairs Quarterly, June 1970, p.375.

Arnstein, S. (1969). "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." JIAP, 35, p. 217.

Ascher, C. (1988). "Improving the School-Home Connection for Poor and Minority Urban Students." The Urban Press.

Bastain, A. et al. (1987). Choosing Equality. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Benellos, G., and Roussopolus, D. (1971). The Case for Participatory Democracy. New York: Viking Press.

Berla, N. and Hall, N. S. (1989). Beyond the Open Door. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Brice Heath, S. and Mchaughlin, M. (1987). "A Child Resource Policy: Moving Beyond Dependence on School and Family." Phi Delta Kappan, April, p. 579.

Cohen, C. (1961). Democracy. New York: Macmillan.

Chaukin, N. F. (Summer 1989). "Debunding the Myth About Minority Parents. "Educational Horizones. Vol. 67, No. 4, 119-123.

Commer, J. P. (November, 1988). "Educating Poor Minority Children. Scientific American. Vo. 259, No. 5, 42-48.

Cummins, J.(1989). Empowering Minority Students. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Dalgado-Gaitan C. (1990). Literacy for Empowerment. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

Espinosa, R. and Ochoa, A. (1990). The Educational Attainment of California Youth: A Public Equity Crisis. San Diego: SDSU Policy Studies in Language and Cross Cultural Education Department (in press).

Epstein, J. L. and Dauber L.S. (1989). Teacher Attitudes and Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner City Elementary and Middle Schools. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools.

Fals Borda, O. (1986). Conocimiento Y Poder Popular. Mexico D.F.: Singlo Veintiuno Editores, S.A.

Freire, P. (1973). Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: The Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (1985). The Politics of Education. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

Goodson, B. and Hess, R. (1978). Parents as Teachers of Young Children: An Evaluation Review of Some Contemporary Concepts and Programs. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

Hampden-Turner, C. (1975). From Poverty to Dignity: Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Harris, L. & Associates. (1987). "The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987: Strengthening Links Between Home and School." New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Henderson, A. (1985). Beyond the Bake Sale. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Henderson, A. (1987). The Evidence Continues to Grow. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Lightfoot, S. (1978). Worlds Apart: Relationships Between Families and Schools. New York: Basic Books

Laosa, M. L. (1983). "Parent Education, Cultural Pluralism, and Public Policy: The Uncertain Connection," in R. Haskins and D. Adams (Eds.). Parent Education and Public Policy. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Massey, G. C., Scott, M. V. & Dornbusch, S. M. (1975). "Racism Without Racists: Institutional Racism in Urban Schools." Black Scholar, 7,3, pp 10-19.

Mexican American Advisory Committee to the Superintendent. Spring, 1987, Minutes. San Diego City Schools.

Nathan, R. D. (1986). The Concentration of Poor People in the Nation's 100 Largest Cities. New York: The School for Social Research.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (1983). Developing Family/School Partnerships. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Nye, A. B. (1989). "Effective Parent Education and Involvement Models and Programs: Contemporary Strategies for School Implementation," in J. F. Marvin (Ed.). The Second Handbook on Parent Education, San Diego: Academic Press.

Ochoa, A., Hurtado J., Espinosa, R., & Zachman, J. The Empowerment of All Students: A Framework for the Prevention of School Dropouts. San Diego: Institute for Cultural Pluralism, SDSU.

Persell, H. C. (1977). Education and Inequality. New York: The Free Press.

Pearl, A. (1989). "Schooling in a Participatory Democracy." Unpublished paper presented under the Distinguished Lecture Series at SDSU/College of Education, Spring.

Rich, D. (1985). The Forgotten Factor in School Success - The Family. Washington DC: The Home and School Institute.

Rich, D. (1987). Teachers and Parents: An Adult-to-Adult Approach. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Rich, D. (1988). Megaskills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Rivera-Santos, I.; Williams, B.; and Ochoa, A. Manual V: Planning and Implementation Issues in Bilingual Education Programming. San Diego: Lau Center, Institute for Cultural Pluralism, San Diego State University.

Swap, M. S. (1987). Enhancing Parent Involvement in the Schools. New York, NY, Teachers College Press.

Thelen, A. W. (1967). Dynamics of Groups at Work. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Department of Commerce. (1988). "The Hispanic Populaton in the United States: March 1988." Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

U.S. House of Representatives (1988). Public Law 100-297: New Federal Laws on Parent Involvement. Washington, DC: U.S. Congress.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 21,1991