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ABSTRACT

The case study of the relationship between classroom life and home for a minority child in an urban school illustrates the complex influences the home has on the child and the ways in which a culturally sensitive teacher can interact with parents in planning for the child's education. The teacher of a combined second-third grade at an urban school characterized by a high degree of parent participation noted that one girl was having great academic difficulties. The child's family found nothing to appeal to them in the programs provided to involve parents, but were obviously committed and concerned parents, whose cultural backgrounds and own personalities made them willing to wait for their child to learn to read in the face of considerable pressure by the school system to enroll their daughter in special education. Ways in which the teacher worked for the child's academic achievement while respecting the wishes of her parents to keep her in the neighborhood school illustrate the multiple points of entry a school or teacher can use to gain the confidence of parents in working together. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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BEYOND HOME/SCHOOL "PARTNERSHIPS": CULTURAL INTERCHANGE IN URBAN SCHOOLS

Open Doors, Closed Doors: Family in a Bronx Elementary School
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Multiple Entry Points for Engaging Families in School Life: An Exceptional Case

by
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We have to recognize that home is ultimately more important than school --it is the out-of- school life that helps the person to keep alive -- to stand in the school arena and not be crushed.

Lillian Weber (1997), p.89

Parenting and teaching are notoriously complicated, uncertain, ambiguous enterprises. When we—teachers and parents—hear one another's stories, the details of our own become clearer. The more we understand, the more insight we bring to the next encounter, and the more solidly we can act on what we've learned. I have written this family and classroom story because to provide improved education and social justice for all children, we need to know more about how individual teachers and families imagine the world and make decisions on behalf of children.

Teachers and school personnel need to recognize the powerful values in the home that support a child's development. When these home values are ignored, the child comes close to being destroyed (Weber, 1997, Suina, 1991). It takes effort for teachers to be aware of home values; they are not automatic or naturally visible in school. Teachers need not (and cannot) reconstitute the home at school, both because parents have an unconditional attachment to their children that teachers cannot duplicate, and teachers can never know their children as parents do (Weber, 1997). But by paying attention to their attitudes and rethinking their strategies for involving families, teachers can become more flexible in developing ways to acknowledge children's home values in school. Teachers can invite families to join the classroom community by providing multiple entry points, knowing that not every family will enter at the same place or benefit from the same kind of contact.

The story that Linda brings forward is about her parents and their relationship with school. This description of the family's interaction with the

classroom teacher and the special education bureaucracy can be read initially as an example of what happens when a cultural gap between home and school is too wide and differences are irreconcilable. Or it can be read as an ultimate success story where a caring family and a caring teacher colluded in protecting the family's central values, perhaps even at the expense of the child's formal academic progress.

The opportunity to explore these issues arose when our NCREST-based team set out to document how teachers, parents, and children express and respond to differences in cultural values and experiences.[1] After many years teaching K-8 children and writing about my own and others' classrooms, this project provoked an old quandary about what teachers needed to know of children's home life. Attempting to understand the distances some children travel between home and school made perfect sense, but like most teachers, I had rarely observed students and their families beyond school. My early training suggested that the best information came from looking closely at children's work and lives in school, since I could only intervene based on what I saw in the classroom. I never had the opportunity to observe families outside of school. This project has allowed me to think more about the powerful influences that operate under the surface of observable behavior and about what happens when I and other teachers see—or fail to see—children reflected through their own cultural lens.

The Teacher and the Family

For this study, I chose Diane Mullins' second / third classroom at PS 3 in New York City, where I had observed in 1981-82 (Jervis, 1986, 1991). Underlying Diane's philosophical stance is fundamental regard for human variety, which in her view, requires her to expand the classroom by 1) making a public, formal place for every child's perspective, not necessarily to form agreement, but as Geertz, in Greene (1995, p. 185) says, "to create a disorderly crowd of not wholly commensurable visions;" 2) exercising a thin layer of imposition — that is, relieving pressure to compete and proposing possibilities

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[1] During the 1996-97 academic year, a research team from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) began a study in four different sites which conceptualized the classroom as the most appropriate place to observe the process of cultural interchange by which families, children, and teachers with different traditions, beliefs, and experience come to mutual understanding. This work is supported by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement Field-initiated grant #R306F60079. The perspective represented here is my responsibility, not the granting agency.

for children; 3) valuing the child's participation in the class at the level and pace that the child chooses — what Diane calls the "child's present contribution" — rather than exclusively valuing the verbal and logical-mathematical skills that school traditionally demands; and 4) contextualizing content to a striking degree so that what she introduces is exceptionally close to children's interests and tied to their own initiative. She resists "the decontextualizations that falsify so much" (Greene, 1995, p.11).

These four philosophical tenets of Diane's teaching require a classroom where, as she said in her early (12/16/80) journal entry: "The central theme of my class is children living together and sharing perspectives."
Absent is a notion of learning based on predetermined curriculum with sequenced skills and specified, measurable outcomes. She welcomes whoever is there in whatever state they arrive. It is enough that they are present.
Growing out of this position is Diane's visceral distaste for the distant, yet ever-present expectations imposed variously by society, upper grade teachers, parents, standardized tests, district, state, and national standards. For her, these external measures provoke ranking, competition, elitism. They contradict the human variety she recognizes each day.

Diane has been teaching at PS 3 for 24 years. She walks to school each day, passing where she was born and went to public school. In her early fifties, she is proud of her family's working-class origins, of the heritage from her Welsh father and New York-born mother, and her maternal Eastern European Jewish grandparents. Ten years ago, Diane wrote: "How can we make our schools work? ...I am asking teachers to make the revolution in our schools by approaching the commitment of parents to their children and by making their own values known" (Mullins, 1988. p. 13). In the spirit of making her values known, she joined me in this work. That she was paid $3000 interested her little; she ultimately gave the money to a charity that helps homeless families.

The Martinez family (Gerry, Emma, Linda, and her older sister Nina) came forward graciously to allow me in their home to follow their experience in Diane's class. [2] The grant paid them $1000, as it did two additional study

[2] Teachers, but not scholars, are often referred to by first names in academic writing, emphasizing the tradition that knowledge about teaching and learning is created by those outside the classroom rather than inside. Although I disagree with that naming convention, I have used Diane's first name and the first names of parents for two reasons. First, because first names are the tradition at PS 3. First names are also an indication of the peer relationship as teacher and parent that I sought to develop. We did this work together. To protect the privacy of children who are too young to give consent, the names of all family members are pseudonyms.

families, to compensate them for their time, energy, and willingness to undergo the scrutiny this research required. I am profoundly indebted to the families and to Diane for their cooperation and colleagial exploration of cultural interchange.

PS 3 was founded by parents in 1971. In 1994, after the first principal's death, the community renamed it the John Melser Charrette School. There is story, perhaps apocryphal, about this "head teacher," as he liked to be called. He was seen one day disciplining a group of children, his tall frame lowered to meet them eye-to-eye. In his New Zealand accent he gently demanded that they must never, never slide down the banister again. Then he took his leave, sliding down the banister. That spirit still infuses the school as children learn to raise their own voices, question authority, and negotiate their own education. This stance conforms to some children's experience and not others.

Generalizations about what works often don't hold: family-school relationships are complicated; the dynamics of learning and development tangled; and school's assumptions about a family's values are not always correct—or helpful. Linda's family came to know Diane over time (measured in years); their understandings of the classroom were mediated by their child, whose pleasure in school they could see. They could also see that Diane respected them and their family values. While this family took little interest in the usual entry points that Diane counted on to engage other parents, they had a relationship with Diane based on subtleties that rarely find their way into large scale studies or prescriptive recommendations.

Diane's Classroom Context

Diane once wrote that all families want their children to "be appreciated, to be seen by open eyes and to be effective in their own lives. When children and teachers are working toward something not of their own design, the classroom becomes difficult for the child. It is trying, as well, for the parent who feels removed from the school" (Mullins, 1988, p. 12). Creating common ground between diverse home cultures and any classroom culture requires negotiation and compromise on both sides. Families literally hand over their second and third graders to teachers, therefore warm relationships with parents strengthen children's ability to negotiate this handover. It is children, however, who must mediate between home and school and this necessary transition propels them out in the world, even when such passage erodes the safety, ease

and belonging that Diane wants for children and their families.[3] School can separate children from their homes, but it is crucial that teachers make it possible for all children to acquire the skills and knowledge they need without choosing between school and home. Diane puts serious energy into dissipating any parental "feeling of remove," but families must be willing to engage with her and the road is sometimes rocky.

No one contests that Diane began the year with school-ready parents. Very few families in Diane's class arrived at PS 3 by accident, which suggests parents' determination to find the most appropriate school for their children — perhaps a good predictor of school success (Lareau, 1989). The demographics of this cohort confirm the considerable data that children of first-generation immigrants from practically everywhere are more highly motivated and pressured to succeed in the system, and often do, than kids in the next generation, especially if they are kids of color and therefore not so easily assimilated in a race-conscious society.

Beyond "Standard" Demographics

The diversity of students is one reason many families choose to send their children to PS 3.[4] For an exploration of cultural interchange, perhaps the

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[3] In a mesmerizing reflection on teaching, entitled "My First Intellectual: An Ex-Jock Remembers the Teacher Who Changed His Life," English Professor Mark Edmundson taps into the distance tween his home and school. He observes that all good teaching involves a "touch of kidnapping" and isn't without costs. p. 60 in *Linguafranca,* March 1999.

[4] PS3 is a neighborhood school, but those outside of the district may apply to attend. By the same application process, some neighborhood children attend other schools. Although the all-school demographics defy categories, convention demands listing official indicators for the 550 students, lest it appear I forgot to notice. Current records show ethnicity: 67% White, 14% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 7% Asian. The figures, however, make nonsense of reality, since the Board of Education form implies that both parents belong to the same arbitrary category. More to the point, this school has a high number of interracial families, receives federal money to support integration, and is known to be a comfortable place for gay and lesbian parents and teachers (New York Times, 5/14/97).

Twenty percent of school families are on free lunch. Between the time we applied for this grant and the time it was granted, the homeless shelters had been removed by the mayor to outlying boroughs, so there were no homeless families in this classroom. Diane took seriously the confidentiality of the free and reduced-fee lunch forms, so I never knew for sure how many of the children applied. Unlike 1981-82, when free lunch children had a lunch pass, such distinctions were no longer public. Any child ate school food who forgot lunch, liked the menu, or was actually entitled . Parents sent lunch money they owed at the end of each month, prompted by a posted sign.

Children in NYC are not currently tested before third grade. During the first year of the study, the third grade scores at PS 3 ranged from 1st percentile to 99th plus percentile. 1996 scores showed 60% of third graders reading at grade level. (NY Times, 1/5/97) p. 10 City Section.)

most striking demographic—defying any generalization about what families bring to school—is that in Diane's 1996-97 class of 27 children, no one ethnic group predominated. Reflecting a rich New York City diversity that increasingly heralds the country's future, parents were born in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Dutch New Guinea, Egypt, England, France, Grenada, Holland, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Puerto Rico, Russia, and the United States. Children with mixed ethnic heritages and racial identities were the norm and children with two European-American parents were the minority. The three student teachers over the year were born in China, Korea, and Bangladesh.

As the United States increasingly becomes home to intermarrying partners who arrive in all kinds of circumstances from all over the world, standard demographic and socio-economic categories no longer adequately describe families. Several parents grew up in desperate poverty; others identified themselves as among the African-American community's "Talented Tenth." And when a mother from an illiterate family in a developing country marries the grandson of Howard University's first medical school graduate, labeling their family makes no sense. Not so long ago, school personnel filled out census forms by "eyeball." Today, parents are asked to self-identify, but instructions do not ask them to check all categories that apply. The records say that 16% of New York public school children are "white" (NY Times , Dec. 29, 1998, B 5).Children in Diane's class came from so many cultures that ascertaining who was "white" provoked hard thinking, and confounded the figures perpetuated by the Board of Education forms.[5]

In Diane's class, economic, religious, educational, employment circumstances, and family constellations existed in unusual configurations, producing unpredictable twists. One parent, a member of marginalized ethnic group, had no current economic safety net, an itinerant job history and an

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Special programs are as follows: Parents have resisted programs for the gifted; families can find tracked ability groups or gifted classes at other city schools if that is what they want for their children. There is a special education class for identified Modified Instructional Services, level 1 (MIS 1) for children younger than seven, pull-out English as a Second Language, Reading Recovery, and daily resource room help for those children who are certified.

[5] In MultiAmerica (Reed, 1996),17-year-old Tennessee Reed says that "mixed kids are the fastest-growing group of children in the United States" (p. 114), and that he "doesn't fit anywhere." Other essays in the section "To Pass or Not to Pass" (113- 142) are variations on how the authors dislike being labeled.

unfinished graduate degree; a white male making a mid-career change chose poverty while training for a potentially secure future; a young single Asia-American father bartered craft skills on an ad hoc basis. A child of a Puerto Rican high school dropout had more financial resources than a child of an white unemployed professional. Some families lived below the poverty line, and their children attended school alongside children whose two parents each earned working-class or middle-income salaries. Young single Latino fathers took responsibility that defied the textbook examples of noninvolvement. African-American Buddhist, African-Caribbean Seventh-day Adventist, Colombian Catholic parents sent their children off to a public school to be educated together.

Education and artistic and/or entrepreneurial spirit was more in evidence than job security or money. In one instance, a French-speaking parent who took reservations for several hours at a French restaurant in exchange for a daily meal for himself and his child. As a group the families in this classroom had energy and vitality, even when from time to time, individual families faced financial, health, employment or marital crises.

Parents worried about the future. Recurring stories stood out about the lack of economic benefits that accompany itinerant and self-employment. Fathers, in particular, told of single parenthood with no life insurance; single mothers, in particular, told of serious illness with no health benefits. Affordable housing, always seriously in short supply in New York, meant large extended families living in too-small spaces with children sleeping on the floor, or families of two or three in tiny, expensive apartments. Talk about tight money arose most often about private education, about life styles. Although many parents made a point of affirming public education, seventeen families mentioned private schools (two families spoke of religious schools rather than independent schools) as something that was possibly desirable, but economically unrealistic.

The take-home lesson from this brief description is the impossibility of generalizing about any home cultures. This diversity is new territory for schools; simplistic thinking does not suffice.

School Support for Parents and Parent Support for Schools

Having enrolled their children in this school, parents expected a "custom-made" rather than a "generic" education (Lareau, 1989), though cultural differences may have dispersed families along a continuum of how involved or welcomed in the classroom they expected to be. What these families who came

from all over the world found in this New York City /third grade class was Diane. In the first year with Diane parents had to adjust. This environment could not help but create some dissonance between parental views and Diane's strong values about what constitutes successful learning for children. Coming to understand "this many-thing happening-environment," as one father put it, was not always comfortable or smooth.

Diane worked hard at drawing parents in and creating opportunities for them to gain first-hand knowledge of the classroom. They had to be willing, however, to persist over several weeks in a setting that may not have made sense to them. This classroom required children to engage in very different modes of learning than parents themselves had known, and to develop significantly different relationships with the teacher than parents may have experienced. What parents saw was not school as they usually knew it. But slowly through formal and informal relationships with Diane, their own exposure to the classroom, and attention to their own children's experiences, parents "got" what this classroom was about. And gradually over time Diane's understanding of individual parents changed the way she responded to their children in small fine-grained ways.

Parents I talked to saw the classroom uniquely through their own values, educational histories, and aspirations for their children.[6] Most families struggled with some degree of "foreigness" to the classroom, even if born and educated in the United States. One mother new to PS 3 taught in an alternative school, so she "got" Diane's pedagogy. She reported immediately that her child found "Diane exactly his type," yet her own European mother, who had major responsibility for child care, found the foul language on the playground highly distressing and was on the phone with Diane at once ("Cursing is not part of my background!"). All families had to rethink, adjust, and shift their world view, at least a little, as Diane responded to who was present without compromising her own values.

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[6] I was in the classroom at least three full days each week for an academic year and attended most parent events. I met 45 parents out of a possible 54. Three fathers and one mother lived outside NYC. Four other separated or divorced fathers and one mother never came to school and I never contacted them. Ultimately, I had informal and/or formal contact with all but two children's families. Two families with whom I spent time refused me permission to tell their stories. Therefore, I talked formally in prearranged taped interviews with 10 parents / couples, and informally with10 more parents/couples with whom I had taped interviews during the course of the year. I talked to (and taped) parents on trips, while waiting for children to be picked up, at all-school events like picnics, graduation, Halloween, and the last day of school. With three study families, I spent much more time, including staying for several days with one family.

This expansion of a classroom community to include *all* families does not happen naturally. Opening up a space for others requires a strong commitment and a strong personality, both of which Diane exercised with a low profile. Yet there is a complex cyclical dilemma built into this notion of a strong autonomous teacher. If the presence of parents comes only with the teacher's consent, then teachers and parents are not partners here. But when teachers have no autonomy, the parent's suggestions cannot be taken and teachers do not have the latitude to respond according to their best judgment. Yet the more the teacher is "in control," the more the classroom belongs to the teacher. Parents can become an intrusion on the "teacher's classroom." Further, if teachers become engaged in professional development which reinforces their stance as "experts" they may widen the gap between parental "experts" who know their children well and teachers who are experts in their own classroom.

The New York City Board of Education Annual School Report includes parent participation. Interestingly, the forms divide up the response space into two categories: "Parental Support for Schools" and "School Support for Parents." In this classroom, these categories amounted to the same thing. Parents accompanied school trips, for instance, not only to increase adult supervision, but also—under Diane's careful orchestration— to enjoy themselves and observe their own children interacting with others. I believe that when both parent support for schools *and* school support for parents occurs close to the child in early elementary school, it is the most important arena for participation and partnership. To be sure, parents had access to other quite powerful school governance committees and all-school volunteer opportunities. This parent-founded school generated myriad opportunities to govern, but parents in this class didn't take them; I am speculating that parents got sufficiently caught up in multiple classroom opportunities that fulfilled their needs. Although many parents volunteered to help with all-school events, they neither ran them, nor did they venture into committees or school-wide councils, many of which invited non-elective participation. The "rightness" of the fit between what parents wanted and what Diane offered in the classroom may decline as children grow older, but in 2nd/3rd grade, it worked for these parents.

How Families Came to Know the Classroom

The notion of school that parents found in Diane's classroom often caused disequilibrium, but stimulated by Diane, parents tended to have the

energy and savvy to rise to the challenge of grappling with divergent values.[7] Or at least they set aside what bothered them and chose to focus on common ground built from increased knowledge, developing relationships, and growing trust.

Parents differed in what drew them into the classroom. Parents who were comfortable in school took up Diane's invitation to visit, often in a spirit of checking up (Lareau, 1989). Parents who were less comfortable approaching school joined more slowly as Diane reached out to them. Parents accompanied class trips where Diane worked hard both to see that they enjoyed themselves so they would want to come again, and that they had opportunities to see her in action so they would be able to trust her with their children. Parents dropped in unannounced, stayed in the morning, or came early to pick up their kids. Eventually, parents ran small groups (cooking, poetry, a newsletter, drama). One mother spent every Friday in the classroom, a father arrived periodically to be an extra adult when Diane withdrew to conference with individual children, two fathers regularly swam with the class and supervised the boys. One mother typed the class literary magazine, giving her a window into her child's peers and their thinking. Every child's family came to scheduled conferences. Class picnics, plays, and myriad all-school events multiplied opportunities for contact.

Diane wrote frequent letters home to parents and twice yearly narrative report cards, which were translated into their home language, if necessary (Mullins, 1992). She also valued parents' own writing, if they chose to do it, but the written word was not for every parent: The written communications hardly seeped into the consciousness of the Martinez family. Nor did they attend the monthly parent gatherings Diane formed for parents to look at children's work, reflect on homework, and get to know other parents, which were crucially important for some families, especially those for whom the distance from the classroom was greatest.

For parents whose work schedules allowed it and whose values encouraged it, direct observation worked. As a matter of school policy, PS 3 allows families unrestricted access, though not all teachers in the school welcomed parents enthusiastically. Diane's classroom door was always open,

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[7] For a more complete description, see Jervis "Between Home and School: Cultural Interchange in an Urban Elementary School," available fall1999 in hard copy from NCREST, and on the web <www.tc.columbia.edu/~ncrest>.

whether children were calmly working at tables, sprawled on the floor in what adults might call disarray, or in a noisy transition from one activity to another. Diane found it helpful for parents to see their children doing whatever it is they were doing. Parents joined whatever activity was taking place. Not every parent applauded what they saw. Diane can raise her voice in irritability (fatigue and her recovery from major surgery may have increased the volume) and one parent found "harsh" what Diane called her "show and tell" anger. But with more time in the classroom, this parent saw that the children "learned to read" Diane's mood and tone, just as Diane read the children's energy and rhythm. Almost always, what parents saw required re-thinking over time, but first-hand experience began the process. One parent's comment about how she came to understand the classroom was typical:

> At first I was a little worried because I hear Diane likes screaming and yelling, or says, "I don't want to talk to you now...." But a couple of times I sit...I come early and I thought about it and I talk with my husband and I think maybe it is all right since the way I see it as a process, how you and children approach each other. And children these days, you have to scare them ...otherwise they won't listen. I come away from class wondering, how does she do it? So I get over that. Her class is very real.

Many parents came to appreciate the classroom for their child's love of school and set aside what bothered them for what they felt their children gained. Interestingly, parents in Diane's class seemed to feel responsible for their children's learning—no one blamed Diane for what kids didn't know even when it was a matter of basic skills like multiplication tables. Perhaps parent's classroom participation encouraged them to feel responsible and, if they felt it important, they took on rote teaching tasks themselves.

All these avenues of participation promoted opportunities for increased mutual understandings between families and teacher, but what worked for one family did not necessarily work for another. As parents began to make sense of Diane's classroom for themselves, various entry points touched parents variously: No one way worked for every parent, but over time parents and Diane began to know each other in ways that made warm connections and empathetic identification with each other possible.

The Martinez family, however, found no appeal in the programs that are generally supported by research on parent partnerships (Epstein, 1995). Gerry and Emma did not write a response to Diane's letter, or come to back to school night, or stay when they dropped Linda off in the morning ("I'm in and out for my kids like

lightening"), join monthly gatherings ("You know how busy I am at home!"), or volunteer to participate in the classroom ("I am just not that kind of parent"), at the swimming pool ("I don't like swimming pools"), or the wider school arena ("I have no interest"). Gerry and Emma "got" the tenor of the classroom ("Of course, Linda loves school because she can open or close a book any time she wants"), weren't sure the pedagogy helped Linda to learn to read, but they appreciated that Linda liked to go to school, that she loved to swim with the class, and that Linda would have had a much harder time in a Catholic school—the only other educational choice acceptable to them. Each June, Emma did go to the beach with the class because she trusted her own supervision of water activities more than the other adults. Gerry came to every parent conference and charmed Diane with his smile and his eagerness to absorb what she had to say. They wanted to know that their children were safe and happy in school, knowledge which came primarily from their children's reports about their day. Since it was repeated chance encounters in the halls and on the street that gave the parents a sense of Diane, it is important to this story that they already knew Diane when Linda entered second grade. The previous year, their older daughter had been a third grader in Diane's class.

When the wider school authorities recommended Linda leave for another school, the parents depended on their relationship with Diane to prevent it.

VALUING HOME

Linda came to Diane's 2nd/3rd grade multi-aged class as a second grader, after having spent March through June the previous year as a first grader in a K-1 class. She spent her second and third grade years in this class.

Linda at Seven

Linda's large sparkling brown eyes and warm open smile invite others to like her. At the beginning of second grade, her permanent eye teeth were not yet even with her two front teeth, giving her a smile with distinctive appeal. She pulled her smooth dark brown hair back in a pony tail or in a long braid. Of Puerto Rican descent, her skin tended toward olive, darker than my Ashkenazi skin, but not much. On most school days, she dressed in brightly-colored nylon pants or sweat pants, long cartoon character tee shirts, and sneakers. She shared these clothes with her older sister. Sometimes she wore rayon blouses and jeans, which looked almost out grown; I suspected these were from an earlier era and her taste had now changed. One recent day she wore a

flowered skirt, jean vest over a white t shirt and a straw hat with a flower; she could have posed for a children's magazine cover.

All during second grade, at school Linda kept herself together in a steady state. Open, calm, collected, trusting, eager, willing to be engaged with a task, she liked school and found everything in class "fun," but she loved swimming best. She took pleasure in the flow of the school day and the trips out of class. When asked to line up, or be ready, she was prompt and organized—neither first nor last in the group. When physically provoked (usually by Tero) she gave a good strong kick right back, got out of his way immediately, and then forgot what happened. She harbored no grudges.

Rarely contributing spontaneous comments to the class as a group, Linda shared with pride what she wrote, no matter how short or repetitive. She was at once interested in doing what was expected and on the other hand, she figured out how to do what she wanted (leave the room during reading, organize some clay work for herself during story time). She loved museums and the museum-related art experiences both in and out of school. When a painting the class saw at the Brooklyn Museum showed up in the Whitney Richard Diebenkorn retrospective, in the midst of the docent's talk to the sitting class, Linda stood up and uncharacteristically blurted out: "I know that painting!" as if she had encountered an old friend.

Linda relished her relationship with her older sister, now in the classroom next door. Linda's main partner in Diane's classroom was third grade Marisol. Marisol (also Latina) took charge of Linda's classroom life with Linda's full knowledge and complicity: "Marisol likes to be alone with me. When I tell Marisol I want to read alone, she thinks I am joking." When Marisol was absent (often), Linda "had relations" [Diane's phrase] with everyone. Tero was a frequent almost-friend. Except for a lazy eye requiring a patch, Linda was otherwise healthy. Of her 27 days absent, sometimes she stayed home to keep her occasionally sick sister company, or visited her grandmother in the Bronx, or remained home just because if felt right to be there with her family.

Linda's spotty past school history led some school adults to make negative judgments about her parents' investment in her educational achievement. She began kindergarten at a Catholic school in the Bronx, where after three months, she cried so much her mother took her out. ("Separation anxiety," said the school psychologist.) Linda returned to that Catholic school the next year for first grade. Then as her parents planned a move to Manhattan,

she stopped attending in November. One delay or another meant no school from December through February. Linda remembered her early schooling unfondly:

> If I didn't bring my sneakers I had to stay in my classroom. Then I had to sit down and write "Next time I will remember to bring my sneakers for recess." Five of those pages. Front and back. Front and back. AND the teacher was so mean. But her husband, he's mean, he's the principal. If you go there, he says "Why you're late?" He used to make fun of me. And if I went to school late he used to put this little thing on me. He'd write something funny and the kids laugh and he takes that ruler and he hits my butt and says go stand up in the corner until class is over, until school is over. (10/16/97)

No similar treatment determined her life at PS 3. Diane worked at nurturing Linda's interests and her self-confidence. Growing things, caring for animals, painting, taking trips made a deeper impression than print and numerals.

Animals captivated Linda. The zoo ("you know, a museum where the animals move") was a favorite place. She invested herself in the tiniest details of her two crabs; they had names (Jack and Mary), habits, and she had obvious feelings about them. Jack died during the year and she saved Jack's quite beautiful shell to display in the room she shared with her sister. In the spring, her tortoise (a new word for her) was the basis for her writing, computer drawing, thinking, action. She knew a lot about this creature which lived under the bed in her house. She loved her 22 year-old half-brother's dog and when he moved out of her family's apartment in May, she missed both her brother and his dog.

Linda loved growing things. Linda's father, the superintendent of a cooperative apartment building, participated with the staff of several other nearby buildings to turn a small plot of land into a lush garden. Essentially Linda and her sister maintained this most urban of all urban spaces. They willingly took responsibility, lavished care, picked up the dog poop and trash with visible pleasure, and passersby (mostly) treated the garden with respect. This garden was an absorbing family activity for Linda and her sister.

During dinner one night (6/12/97), with a fork in one hand and a blob of clay from her pocket ("a thumb print," Linda called it) in the other, she idly turned this clay into a tiny replica of the dead bird she had found on the street. While Linda often "played" with clay, she did not "play" so frequently with language. She noticed small visual details--the partial dragon wing in a *New Yorker* cover

drawing, the expression of dismay in an illustration in a basal reader ("Why is this person sad?"), but words and letters and their sound/symbol relationships were an ongoing mystery to her. Linda was willing, even eager to learn and not daunted by the enormity of what there was to learn—an outcome Diane worked hard to achieve.

About school work, Diane said: "Linda is not at-risk, but her academics are." At the end of second grade, Linda could not integrate meaning from written text. She looked for visual cues in pictures and adult faces and did not attempt to make sense of what she read. While attempting to read or write, Linda moved slowly, both to start and to accomplish either a teacher-chosen or self-chosen task. To watch Linda struggle calmly with work that was torturously hard for her to grasp made her road to mastery look easier that it was. Since the structure and climate of the classroom did not promote comparison, Linda remained oblivious to the distance between her skills and the rest of the class. She lacked interest in checking out others' levels, plus her sidekick Marisol struggled as well.

At first, I fantasized arrogantly that if Linda lived in my reading-and-writing household, she would master print more quickly. I would, of course, make up for her lack of Richard Scarry "naming" experiences and absence of bedtime stories (Heath, 1983). I would have my encyclopedia easily accessible rather than stored behind carefully ordered hard-to disturb glass animals; my printer cartridge wouldn't be empty; I would have sharp pencils at the ready. It took me a year to realize that Linda's learning was more complicated than a shortage of sharp pencils and that neither I nor many others in her life had the skills to help her. I took video tapes of Linda's reading in school, notes on resource room sessions, and (a powerful experience) listened at intervals over two years to her read Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* on her bed. From one page to the next, she did not recognize the simplest words including "the." She was surrounded by books, print, and talk in Diane's class. Diane believed that part of the problem arose from Emma's own mispronunciations (due neither to her Bronx accent nor her bilingual Spanish/English speech, but to her own idiosyncratic intonation and syllable order) that prevented Linda from making the aural connections between what she heard at home and what she saw in print. [8]

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[8] Brent Staples (1997)describes children in Linda's situation like this: "In the most extreme cases, children appear to have abnormal activity in the parts of the brain that process phonemes—the

Because there is a policy of resource room help for "at-risk" children for a period of six weeks without a completed evaluation, she had daily help as early as February of her second grade year in a one-size-fit all resource room program where she didn't always follow what was happening. Linda sometimes finessed the work by copying others or making herself quietly compliant and invisible. The skill level of reading help that Linda needed far exceeded anything the classroom teacher, the parents, the resource room or I could offer.

As Linda's reading levels came to the attention of the wider school personnel, casual scuttlebutt came to the surface to explain her slow progress, bruited around by everyone except Diane: her mother thinks she's helping her but she's not; it's her Spanish speaking home; her parents don't care—look at her many absences; and, at first, from my university stance, I confess to thinking more than once about cultural capital. But all of that talk missed the point: Linda's family interpreted the world differently than we did. Which still raised the question that if school's main purpose is to equip children with skills to make further education possible, what should the school do when that aim is frustrated by a child's low achievement and a family's patience. Diane resisted conventional school solutions and joined in the family's willingness to wait.

Family Background

The language of the home was English, although the parents sometimes spoke to each other in Spanish. Born in this country, Gerry spent his early childhood in Puerto Rico. At 9, he came back to the Bronx without any English. He did well in ESL and advanced Special Progress classes. In high school, when his mother was 50, she got ill from consequences of childhood rheumatic fever and died. "When my mother died, my academics slid and I lost my drive to do well in school, but I graduated."

Emma's grandmother left Puerto Rico without her husband and with one child ("She had four miscarriages—no Cesareans available.") and settled in the Bronx. That only child, Emma's mother, gave birth to Emma at age 15. Emma grew up in the South Bronx and went to public schools: "I lived in the Projects and moved around a lot. I came from a broken home with real problems. My mother struggled. My father was a drug addict." Emma's schools

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most basic sounds that correspond to the letters of the alphabet. The simplest rules of language elude them. When asked for a word that rhymes with 'cat,' for example, they have no idea what the question means. They stumble over words like 'it' and 'the.' The disorder affects children of all cultural backgrounds and intelligence levels. It strikes those who were read to as infants as well as those who grew up without a book in sight" (p. 64).

were strict. she approved, but when she got to high school she "stopped paying attention." She was very emphatic: "Nothing was the matter with the schools. I was the one who fell in with the wrong kids." At seventeen she met Gerry and moved in with him. Gerry had two young sons, whom she often cared for. "He liked how responsible I was for them." Emma's grandmother kept pushing her to get married ("I think that Gerry reminded her of my grandfather who had just passed away). According to Emma, her grandmother's great strength was that "she made me think of the future." Emma married Gerry at 20, had her first child at 25, her second at 26, and knew for sure that "two was enough". Although she missed her family in the Bronx, she recognized her move to Manhattan as "up." She felt blessed to be living in a nice apartment with two healthy children and a husband with a good job.

Home

How Gerry came to have this job was oft-told family lore. From Emma's retelling (3/7/97):

> Gerry drove a cab for 20 years and sometimes the streets were so slow that he barely made enough to pay for the leasing and nothing for his pocket. One day a lady passenger said to him, "You are so talented. Why are you driving a cab?" He thought about that over and over and decided to take a maintenance course at the local community college. He was best in the class so he got the first job—but it was a porter's job, which he didn't really want, but he did it and the tenants liked him so that when the old super retired, he got the job. And an apartment on the largest line with the highest ceilings.

By both his and his wife's report (and I speculate the tenants as well), Gerry was hard-working, skilled with his hands, pleased to be in charge of his own schedule, and eager to supervise others. It was tenants in the building who encouraged the family to choose this school, the tenants with whom they connected to the school community, and to whom they went for that network information that Lareau (1989) argues offers so much home advantage. They had confidence that PS 3 was a "good" school because tenants had chosen it for their children.

Linda's mother worked in the house, and created an enviably (I am envious) comfortable, orderly home. She volunteered that she was not a "public person. I prefer home to any place." From my notes (3/7/97):

> I had a sense that Emma was proud to show me this perfectly kept house with all its new things. There was a fax on the mantelpiece, a new Macintosh Performa in the master bedroom, where it sits in a sunny corner and the kids have access. Linda and her sister share a tiny space but all the toys are meticulously organized in matching plastic containers under the bunk bed. A set of encyclopedias on the book shelves fronted with toys that would have to be moved to use the books (a perfectly good decorating solution, but hard to use the books). Many Barbie dolls. A doll house in the front coat closet. And the old school work was saved in a great big turquoise Tiffany box—as if it were a diamond necklace. We sat for hours pouring over old family photographs and pictures of recent family excursions. The enlarged school pictures had an important place on the mantelpiece and Emma was thrilled to be able to afford pictures for the first time since Linda was born.

Within the family circle, Linda's independent school persona took a different turn. Her mother tied her shoes and her sister did her written homework. The work of the home got done under meticulous adult instruction and supervision, no back talk, and perfect results. The shared TV in Linda and Gina's bedroom regulated jointly and smoothly. The siblings were each others' best friends and playmates. Linda was tightly bound to the home world of uncles, aunts, grandmothers, cousins, half-brothers. Visiting extended family brought new and varied experiences: listening to her uncle play the guitar at street fairs, church with her aunt, birthday parties, weddings, funerals. Her mother felt that Linda was still too young to have school friends and that no play dates could take place until parental visits were exchanged. If Linda was hurt by not being included in classmates' birthday parties or other out-of-school social events, it did not show.

Diane's Stance Toward Families

Diane's feels it is arrogant to think that school matters more than home and conveyed that feeling to parents, even as she encouraged them to participate in school. Any time Diane saw Gerry or Emma on the street in front of school, in the hallway or in the neighborhood, she invited them to join some activity. "I'll try" was sometimes an answer; "I don't have time," was another. Diane got to know the values of their home by being in an ongoing relationship over time, at parents conferences with Gerry, by watching how the parents and children were together, by listening to Linda.

Diane credited parents for the home values that she built on. For instance, at the second grade November conference (11/14/96), Gerry's

mention of Linda's interest in animals sparked the conversation and allowed Diane to enthuse over his shared activities with Linda and her observations of classroom animals. In the 3rd grade fall conference, Diane made no judgment about Linda's 27 absences the previous year, but encouraged Gerry to take Linda on his repair rounds when "she was sick, but not too sick" to "let her learn those mechanical things as you go about your work" (11/17/97).

Diane did suggest parents add academic-minded games to their repertoire to make the home more like school, as, for instance, when she instructed Gerry to play war with two cards up. "You add them together and the one with the highest total takes them both." At every conference, she gave him invitations for free one-on-one reading help in a local neighbor organization. She acknowledged that time might be a problem for the family, but "it is right down the block." Not until the summer of the first year, did those "take." Emma usually responded, "If it gets in the way of our family time, no way."

Diane's first narrative report about Linda detailed her reading skills:

> Linda is just beginning to have a sense of reading. She knows the letters of the alphabet and the sounds of consonants. She is able to sound out the beginning of a word. She is just beginning to learn the sounds of vowels, short and long. Through rhyming exercises and repetition of sound families, rereading books and becoming familiar with the language of books I think Linda will become a reader. It is not coming easy for her. Linda mispronounces many words. She may hear then incorrectly. Perhaps her hearing should be checked. I think Linda can quality for supportive services within our school. At the last parent teacher conference I suggested the Greenwich House Program in reading as a possibility. Linda certainly has the will to read. At this time reading is hard for her. For many children reading comes late, Linda is among the younger children in the class and reading may not be so late for her.

In early January, after the narrative report went home, Diane "chased down Emma in the hall" and asked her to apply for special education help. Diane felt a parent-initiated request eased the bureaucratic obstacles and brought parents into the decision-making process. Diane didn't act sooner because, "I had to let the parents develop trust in me about Linda." Emma saw Linda's "slowness" at getting the basics her older sister "got easily," and she willingly complied without knowing how this application would unfold. Had Emma not had a relationship with Diane, she would never had completed the forms.

Special Education and the Wider School Vs. the Family.

It is surprising to no one that unequal power dynamics between school personnel and less "sophisticated" (Gerry's word) parents are exacerbated by a subtle devaluing of families outside the white middle class mainstream. The legally binding, formal, professional, meetings to decide children's fate do include parents, even if their participation is not carefully thought through. Had Emma not been present, the meeting would have proceeded anyway. From my notes of the 3/11/97 special education team meeting:

> I had permission to attend this mid-morning meeting from Emma, but I didn't exactly feel welcomed. Diane made plans to be there but in the end came in late because her class coverage fell through. Emma sat facing the school team. I sat on her left and a space on Emma's right remained vacant for Diane, who would join when someone could cover her class. Teachers do not vote and often they are not even present.[9]
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> After a genuinely warm introduction that conveyed how much the team enjoyed working with "pretty, polite" Linda who was "like sunshine," the four professionals (educational, speech and language, psychological, and social work evaluators) gave in turn exquisitely detailed catalogues of Linda's deficits, including the "insular" nature of her weekend life spent at home. Team members backed up their reports with concrete evidence, vivid examples, language specific to their fields, technical labels, and test scores, including IQ. Had it been me I would probably have broken down in tears, mourning for my child's lost academic potential.
>
> Emma said simply: I appreciate the help." She agreed with these descriptions, adding that she worked with Linda, the family had books, a computer, a subscription to *Highlights Magazine,* but that she, too, saw that Linda could not do what the team said she could not do. Periodically, she said "I wish my husband could hear this report."
>
> Four times Emma was asked about Spanish in the home. "No, we speak English at home," she said. Yet at the end of a complicated report when Emma looked puzzled, she was asked, "Would you be more comfortable if this conference took place in Spanish?" Perhaps team members needed to make absolutely

[9] As anyone who has ever been involved in these proceedings knows, the politics are more complicated that I have told here. Even who covered Diane's class while she attended the meeting was a political issue. As of winter, 1999, there is a new rule that teachers MUST attend, but the union is contesting it and so the participation of teachers at the meetings is in limbo.

sure that they gave the language issues a fair hearing. Parents are required to sign a form that says "No cultural and linguistic factors influence the academic deficits in this child's case," and Emma had signed it. One team member rolled her eyes when Emma said she had not completed the medical form and someone explained slowly how to get it done at a clinic, even though Emma explained she had high quality health insurance which would cover the costs.

Emma was quiet, dignified, composed, even when the team presented their conclusion that Linda should go to a MIS 1 (Modified Instructional Services, Level 1) special education class in another school. Because one member dissented, Emma did not need to sign papers agreeing to the team's recommendation. Another hearing at the district office would be necessary. Linda's lazy eye and a potential hearing problem kept the matter from unanimity. .

When Emma was silent, even impassive, in the face of a proposed move to another school, someone on the team reminded her that she had requested this evaluation. To the expressed wish that her husband could hear the information, the response was "Why wasn't your husband here today? We told you he could be here." That Tuesdays and Thursdays were impossible for him went unheard. Alternatively the team suggested that he attend the next district office meeting which would resolve the dispute on the team.

At this point, Diane, who said explicitly that she was advocating for the parents, kept pushing the team that if Gerry made an appointment, she was sure someone on the team would convey the information. "Yes, but we can't spend an hour and a half like we did today" was the answer. Heavy case loads and tight schedules burdened the team in a way they couldn't easily make room for a second conference on Linda.

Diane expressed the central problem for the family: "The difficulty centers around moving to another school. It is one thing if it is a small class of 15 down the hall, but in another school, away from her sister and the community she has already built, and requires a school bus....."

The split decision was already a disappointment to the two members of the team who wanted to see this case resolved, partly because it meant more forms and more bureaucracy for the team. The third member understood from Diane that Linda's mother would not let her move and supported the family with her vote. But many professionals (including the two members who voted for MIS1) could look at the test results and believe passionately that the move was the right way to promote Linda's learning.

As someone called the District Office to set a date for the next meeting, Diane suggested to Emma that she visit some of the classrooms in other schools to get a sense of what they were like. "No," said someone on the team. "You can't do that. You have to wait for the District Office decision. They will offer you one choice at a time and you can't reject it for just any reason; it has to be concrete, like that the age isn't right. If you reject a MIS 1 class, if that is the recommendation, then you forfeit even daily resource room help."

The team did not conduct this meeting as if the school and the family embodied a caring and equitable partnership on behalf of a child (Epstein, 1995). The powerfully expert portrait of Linda's deficits and the professional evidence-based report came through clearly; respect for the family and their perspective did not. Nowhere was the competence of the family's considerable parenting skills explicitly acknowledged. The genuine warmth the team felt for Linda did not extend to her mother. Unlike Linda in the testing situation, Emma did not "radiate sunshine" as she often did in her home; she projected a reserved, even chilly, persona. Diane said later to me, "Good for Emma for keeping her own counsel."

Because parents are not considered an essential component of the meeting, and the team lacked knowledge about the family's cultural framework, they were unwilling to make extra efforts to include Gerry when Emma clearly wanted him there. Had Emma negotiated the schedule when the meeting was set up, she might have achieved her aim of having Gerry present. Perhaps had she been accustomed to asserting herself with school authorities, she would have insisted the meeting be discontinued until her husband could be present, but it would have been culturally inappropriate for her to behave in such an individualistic way.[10] Emma's silence conveyed (falsely, it turned out) her

[10] See Nydia Garcia-Preto's chapter on Puerto Rican Families (McGoldrick et. al., 1996) which points out that : "Puerto Ricans...are rewarded for submissive and respectful behavior. They experience conflict and anxiety when they confront a society that frowns on passivity and expects independent, individualistic behavior" (p. 192). Also see Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco's chapter (1993) on "Hispanic Cultural Psychology" for a discussion of the absence of individualistic motivation and the importance of family relationships for supporting student achievement. Both chapters encourage the understanding of the cultural dimensions in working with Puerto Rican families that might have encouraged the school-based support team to rethink the meeting and how they convey information. Annette Lareau talks about parental distrust (1989), giving an example of a distrustful African-American mother who asserted herself to the point of causing scenes to get the attention of the school authorities. That would not be Emma's style.

willingness to comply with anything the experts recommended.[11] The structure and tone of the meeting suggested that parental compliance was the way its meant to be and graven in stone.

I sensed Emma cleverly didn't say too much, didn't argue in order to reserve her options, but the experience went much deeper than an instrumental plan. Afterwards, we went to her home for tea. Only when I had my coat on to leave did Emma admit how upset and demeaned she felt without Gerry. "He is older, he understands more. I don't know how to talk in meetings like this. I was afraid I would sound ignorant. Did I sound stupid?" she wanted to know. Her reticence was not a strategy, but a ploy not to reveal that she didn't know what to say. "I was so relieved when Diane walked in the room," she said. The deficit labels had washed over her, but more than mourning Linda's lack of academic achievement, she felt outclassed by experts with whom she had no relationship.[12] Had her husband been with her, it would have made all the difference in the meeting for her feelings, but it would not have gotten around her absolute refusal to put her child on a yellow bus to attend a different school away from her sister. "No way. I'll take her out of school before I do that."

A few days later, she said, "It took me until I took a shower that night to cry about how the meeting made me feel," and how she appreciated that Diane would be at the next round of district-level meetings to resolve the team's split decision.

In fact neither she nor Gerry were there; she didn't feel well and Gerry had an emergency plumbing situation and couldn't leave the building. Diane's presence—a surprise to the district office personnel since teachers rarely, if ever, attend—allowed her to advocate for the family and argue that the case be kept open until the lazy eye was remedied, since that condition might interfere

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[11] At the time I didn't know that I was probably witnessing the face of respeto (respect), which often takes the form of respectful silence and is characteristic of a deference to authority (Young, 1998). Emma's silencedid not mean agreement, but neither I nor others at the meeting knew that.

[12] Michelle Young (1998) points out that not asking questions is characteristic of Latino deference to authorities and that non-questioning stance reinforces status inequities in school. Lack of questioning is not necessarily of matter of ethnicity. When my five-year-old daughter had a test to measure her brain waves, the well-meaning pediatric neurologist kindly read the results immediately right in front of us: "She has an abnormal brain and clumsy child syndrome." I couldn't think of a single question or comment. (It took three days before my daughter asked me what clumsy meant.) I was in the same situation as Emma and I wished my husband had been there too. Unless experts create space for questioning, and convey willingness to take time to answer, the appearance of mute compliance will continue to be the norm--especially when the topic under discussion is anxiety-provoking.

with Linda's reading. Had the school team's recommendation to move Linda been unanimous and parents been opposed, the district level personnel would have sent Linda's case immediately to arbitration to be decided on that very day. To be fair, sometimes policies serve to protect the rights of families and children, even as they increase the adversarial nature of home-school relationships.

Differing Assumptions about Learning and Parental Responsibility

Throughout the two years in Diane's class, both Gerry and Emma agreed with each other that Linda would "learn in time." Emma reiterated often how she didn't like to pressure Linda to learn: "You have to want to learn from the inside, you can't force it." The parents saw their child whole. Gerry said often, "We don't want to force our children. Linda will learn but will require lots of patience." Emma was clear that God will take care that Linda learns.

Diane's rhetoric often sounded similar as she emphasized the present capacity of the child, but Diane also persisted in recommending outside reading help after school, to which Gerry said neutrally: "Linda wants to stay home." Gerry and Emma refused to make Linda's lack of reading the center of their house. There was family visiting, gardening, housework to animate their lives. Diane's actions stood firmly with the parents' values.

The resource room teacher struggled to teach Linda, and had different assumptions about what it would require. From my notes 11/17/97:

> Linda is much slower than the others and it is a dilemma whether to slow the rest down or let Linda float in the wind. In an ideal world Linda would go to a special school where they would address her deficits every day in every subject. The next best option would be a daily learning specialist. The public school really doesn't really have built in time for highly trained teachers to work this intensely. Linda might never learn to read at all—I don't think that will happen but it could. Other parents help their kids for fifteen minutes a night. Why doesn't Linda's family?

After a sobering admission of her own teaching dilemmas, she suggested that Linda's parents should do the hard job of teaching Linda to read. In this way, educators make parents responsible for a task that pushes them to do the impossible. This stance is counter-productive.

Had I not experienced working with Linda, I would not have understood the challenge of teaching her. Doing homework with Linda was intensely frustrating. Emma admitted, "I have no patience to force Linda. She resists. It takes her such a long time to do anything." True. From my notes (6/12/97):

> I took some dictation about the dead bird Linda had found in the street and then Linda started copying the whole thing over. It went ever so slowly and might have taken over an hour to complete, too much for a seven-year-old. After Linda copied a few words, I went to the bathroom and when I came back her mother had the pieces of paper in her hand and Linda was in tears. Linda had torn the whole thing up—perhaps to avoid having to complete it under the monitoring of their well-meaning guest. Nina had also written her own composition using Linda's dictated words. Linda then took Nina's writing and put her own name on it so the comp may well show up at school, which seemed to be alright with both girls. This backstage look into the work that came to school made me understand why Linda often arrived with only a sentence fragment in her own hand and how she must have labored over it.

After watching homework scenes and participating in a few, I could see why Linda's struggle with text demanded the most skilled help available. Criticizing parents for not being able to offer this help seems unfair.

Although most children will learn to read without "intense instruction," experts in learning disabilities recommend it. "Intense instruction" is characterized by opportunities for consistent and sustained time on task; immediate, frequent, and appropriate feedback to the students; regular and frequent communication to each student that the teacher expects the student to accomplish the task and demonstrate continuous progress; and a pattern of interaction in which the teacher responds to student initiatives and uses consequences appropriate to the student's responses. Naomi Zigmond and Janice Baker (1996) argue that this pedagogy—even 15 minutes a day of such one-to-one instruction—is more likely in a pullout program than in the regular classroom. Had Linda's mother chosen to impose intense instruction, she had the temperament for it. Housekeeping, grooming, pet care, and gardening were done to a standard I cannot imagine reaching with my children. But teaching reading in this manner to Linda would have stretched the most patient parent when neither classroom nor resource room teachers were up to the task. And given Linda's rate of progress, this home teaching might not have worked in any case, causing too much frustration for both mother and child. [13]

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[13] Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1993) notes that learning environments in the home matter to academic success more than parent's educational level, race, marital status or family size (income is conspicuously missing from the list) and involving parents in learning how to help their children improves children's achievement. Learning to help one's child with school undoubtedly works for many children and their families. But no reasonable number of workshops would have helped Emma learn enough to teach Linda to master print. There are examples of parents who devote

Many factors intertwine on the issue of homework help. It is possible that Diane's open-ended writing homework may have been harder for Linda to complete than a rote assignment. Such structured homework might have been equally helpful to her learning, but tackling it consistently would have opened the family's home life to more intrusive school-determined uses of time and energy than they were willing. Even had they been willing to push themselves harder to help her, she might not have learned to read any faster.

Most likely one-on-one specialist help (which Diane consistently and emphatically urged) offered the best solution, but that required seeing Linda primarily as a non-reader, and her non-reading as the central determinant of the family schedule. For some families that priority of getting help would be axiomatic. Not here. So occasionally Nina wrote Linda's stories.[14] Or Linda cried and Emma capitulated in the face of her tears and allowed her skill the resource room after a school trip.

Lack of academic achievement was not the tragedy that it might be in some families, but in no way did this family's choices mean that they lacked interest in Linda's education. Linda's parents accepted her as she was without focusing on her gaps and deficits. Somewhere deep down Gerry and Emma knew that Diane's class was right for Linda and while they thought about changing her, in the end they didn't because they saw how much she loved school.

The Story in Progress

By June of second grade, with daily Resource Room help, Linda learned to attend to beginning and ending sounds. No one questioned Linda's need for daily, structured help, but at the end of the year, as a favor to Diane, the ESL / Reading Recovery teacher evaluated Linda and confirmed Linda's need to grow substantially to reach a level where she could participate in third grade level reading, writing, and math. By November of third grade, Gerry saw

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themselves entirely to remedying children's deficits, but this family did not see Linda as needing to be fixed.

[14] Shared labor is a family value. When I delivered my draft to the family, Nina showed me a recent paper for which she had received an A grade. The teacher had especially praised the organization, and had written out an outline after-the-fact to demonstrate to Nina why the order and headings worked so well. In actuality, since Nina had waited till the last minute to begin this assignment, Emma copied the paper right out of a jaunty sounding book written for teenagers. It had not been spellchecked, and with its errors was an absolutely credible high quality 6th grade paper. Emma's effort and the top mark were considered a family success, since Emma had recently gone back to school herself and said, "I thought I had forgotten how to read, but it all came back to me."

improvement: "Linda is reading more; asking for spelling words, doing math on the computer, writing stories." Diane was still suggesting more help in addition to resource room, but Gerry resisted for the same reasons he always had: more help was unnecessary and took too much family time: "We don't want to pressure her; she will learn in time."

At the end of third grade, while Linda's progress doubled in many areas, as measured by the special education evaluation, her math and reading skills lagged far, far behind her peers. Yet Linda's continued absences and her parents' reluctance to go way out of their way to get help made them tolerant of her less than optimal progress. It would have been easy to hold Diane responsible for Linda's not reading, but they felt Diane's concern, and appreciated the small concrete progress Linda was making, even as they kept rejecting most of Diane's recommendations for more outside of school reading help. At the end of third grade, Diane considered having Linda repeat third grade in 3rd/4th grade multi-aged class. The parents, however, requested a straight fourth grade with the same teacher who had Linda's sister.

It was immediately clear that Linda could not keep up in classroom organized so differently than Diane's. Two things had changed since the first special education meeting 18 months ago. First, Linda had a sleepover for a whole weekend out of the city with two peers from Diane's class. (Gerry told me how much he and Emma missed her and that they had to stop themselves from making too many phone calls. For her part, Linda told me about the deer that had wandered in the road and "stared right at them" through the headlights, and how "I had to keep Joella and Sarah from fighting." Second, Linda's sister had now graduated. Not accepted into the alternative school of her choice, she had gone to the local large junior high and hated the size and the impersonality. Gerry and Emma immediately transferred her to a Catholic school, which "she loved." Now they were ready to consider letting Linda go to another school.

I volunteered to go with Gerry to the district-level case review in the role of parent advocate. Although we waited for over an hour and the meeting provoked anxiety by its official and intimating tone (which didn't unduly daunt Gerry, at least at the time), Linda's placement was easily arranged. It happened that Linda could fill an immediate opening in a nearby school with a teacher who had once taught at PS 3. Gerry refused to sign anything before he had visited the class, which was permitted. (The word got back to the school before I did that the family had brought a lawyer to contest the MIS 1 placement.

"Anytime they see someone well-dressed they think 'lawyer,' said someone at school. I actually wore jeans, as did Gerry, but I suspect it was my standard English that got me labeled.)

Diane wrote at the end of second grade, "Linda needs as much help as she can get, *now that she is interested.* " One could conclude that Diane's class gave Linda a solid foundation of confidence that facilitated essential motivation to read and write. The animals in the classroom, the art, the trips built a sounder self. Linda was not a deficit in Diane's eyes or her parents. Or one could believe as did the special educators that Diane's class served Linda badly because she needed a much more regular rote program to build up a core of reading vocabulary and parents who worked with her regularly.

Linda's new teacher (and Linda's improved facility with *Green Eggs and Ham)* confirmed Linda's extraordinary progress during the previous four months. Linda, her family, and the teacher were pleased with her special education classroom. When I met the teacher, in practically one breath she said two contradictory things which go to the heart of the matter: "Linda has more general knowledge than any other child in the class. You can tell kids who have been in special education for a long time because their curriculum has been so narrowly focused on skills." And: "Diane knows how to recognize Linda's learning difficulties. Why didn't she send Linda to special ed earlier?" Diane does not consider this a dilemma—there was no choice. These strong parents knew their kid and refused all other choices."

The attitude that the child "suffered" because parents didn't know how to help her—a standard reason for parent partnership as parent education—is irrelevant here. Linda needed high level skilled teaching and conditions that allowed a teacher to work with her one-on-one. Some savvy, aggressive parents of children with Linda's level of need now sue for the cost of tuition in private schools. When I asked Gerry if taking that route would interest him, the answer was clear: "No," and then a softer, "Well, if it would help Linda..." But he was honest about his distaste that legal effort. Besides, he added, "Linda will learn in time."

The line between "You can't force learning" and "Kids learn when home become more like school," is murky, especially when parents and educators are assigning each other responsibility and blame. Annette Lareau argues that making home more like school causes stress for low achieving middle class children. Lareau says that working class families feel more separate from

school, give up more easily, and thus avoid conflict and stress. Some might argue that this description fits Linda's family, but I do not think it does. They did not "give up" or "feel separate." Rather Diane's openness to variation among children and a classroom designed to avoid academic stress as well as downplay academic pressure became "a kind of a home," as the PS 3 school song says. The Martinez family took school into their home in the manner of Diane's classroom, perhaps a good example of one kind of cultural interchange.

I sense that the family's strong values, stable marriage, two healthy children born to them in Emma's mid-twenties, and Gerry's good job gave the family confidence in their own decisions. They were not beholden to the school "as experts" who could tell them what to do. Whether Linda's family would have felt more comfortable if they had more education, felt more entitled (or interested) to engage in school politics, or their child had been an unarguable academic success story, I can't know. I sense that they felt part of the community because they had access to others who had access (the tenants in Gerry's building) and because they had access to Diane who was always welcoming. My access to the family came when Emma dropped in to discuss how she didn't want Linda to "feel like a geek" with her new eye patch. Diane reassured her and I asked if I could come for tea, which then became a pleasant habit. Emma said had she not wanted me in her living room, "you can be sure you wouldn't be here."

Toward Conclusions

Society's expectation is that children will be changed by school, but our team is arguing for cultural interchange—that school practice should also evolve in response to children. Guadalupe Valdes (1996) points out—with sadness—that a school's ability to educate is judged against a mainstream culture of achievement with its focus on individual upward mobility rather than an understanding of home values. This description of Linda and her family demonstrates how that is so. Granted, policy makers don't make policy based on a single case, but looking closely at how interactions among members of the school community embody or distort support for one child's learning can open up opportunities to reflect on home-school policies.

Keeping that frame in mind, I have sketched out some implications that evolved from documenting Diane's classroom and Linda's family. What follows

are some elements in the process of cultural interchange and some further thoughts on home-school partnerships.

Cultural Interchange is Based on Relationships Which Grow Over Time

Cultural interchange requires the capacity to imagine the world through others' eyes. It is not a one-shot event. To recognize what is central to another person (in Linda's case the centrality of her close-to-home life), then understand it, appreciate, and take account of it in action requires individuals to engage over time, especially when the values teachers and children and families hold are very different from one another. Relationships in schools proceed slowly and unevenly. Had Diane not recognized the family's strengths and values, she might have pushed Linda's not-reading as the most important thing about Linda, and produced an adversarial situation with the Gerry and Emma that would have been fruitless, even disrespectful. By the time Linda's not-reading became an issue, Diane and the family had enough of a relationship for Diane to know that they would not send her to another school in second grade—no matter what.

The Necessity of Multiple Entry Points Means Rejecting the Numbers Game

This study suggests that by providing multiple entry points to the classroom community—and not assuming that any one structure is right for all parents— families will come to feel they themselves are helpful to their children's learning in *whatever way they can be.* The parent role need not be school-determined, since the school is not necessarily the center of a family's life (Weber, 1997). Adopting such an attitude would reduce the common school lament "but no one came" that often describes an event to which most invitees did not attend. Small numbers of takers should not deter schools from offering options. Not every parent enjoys formal monthly descriptive reviews, but the experience is powerful for those who do. Linda's parents considered themselves part of the classroom community, even though they participated in none of the entry points Diane provided.

The Importance of Unrestricted Access for Developing Relationships

The process of cultural interchange between home and school, I have come to believe, must include opportunities for families to have unrestricted access to the classroom, especially when the school is different from parents' own experience. An open door policy is in and of itself threatening to many teachers and administrators, but educators must begin to think hard about it as

both schools and demographics change simultaneously. When children and their families feel welcome at school and in the classroom, they can develop informal relationships that lead to trust, and therefore greater identification with each other. Teachers must warmly embrace the families of the children they teach. For too long educators have tended to cultivate distance—except when they need "parents as partners" to cooperate with the schools' agenda.

Images Matter to Policy

Inviting families in—at their convenience, on their terms—requires a major change of attitude. That shift from indifference and distancing to genuine initvation requires slow, subtle moves and tiny actions. Diane's first day of school was marked by a dramatic hand motion when she stood at the classroom door beckoning parents in. The image of a teacher's open-handed gesture drawing families into the classroom needs to be in every policymaker's head before good home-school policies can be enacted.

Political Power is Not the Only Measure of Access

In Diane's class, the parents who became engaged in daily classroom life did not necessarily want the power to make curricular, budget, or hiring decisions, although those avenues were available in the wider school arena. I suspect parents felt participating in the classroom was more authentic and satisfying than the all-school forums (Anderson, 1998). Perhaps after the pathways between home and school are well traveled, families will be more interested in joining school governance efforts, but it is a mistake to assume that the exercise of political power is the only measure of access to school.

Amy Wells (1998) suggests that college educated parents are the ones demanding access to school and the right to make decisions, therefore reinforcing the middle class status that parents already control. But I believe that most (all) parents and children benefit by a closer relationship with school through the classroom. Therefore access—even if it comes initially without wider school decision-making power—is necessary for forming relationships between parents and teachers. I realize that, as Michelle Fine points out (1993), this position leads individual families to advocate for their own children and risks diluting the necessary power struggles that might produce changed practices through wider political engagement. But a focus on the power issues also can dilute potential relationships and cultural interchange that are a vehicle for improved school practices that benefit individual children.

Alliances on Behalf of Children Involve Reciprocity

Trust between schools and families is not a given (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Trust is the expectation that someone in a position to do harm will do no harm. There is, however, a complex dilemma here. It is unnecessary to trust people who have no power over you. If parents have no particular political power (Fine,1993), school authorities have no real reason to trust parents. For individual parents and teachers to develop trust, the ground has to shift from power struggles to reciprocal relationships that encourage empathy and understanding of each other's perspectives (Kelman, 1997). The family trusted Diane because she valued what they had done to support their children and showed them that she valued their parenting by respecting their decisions. Diane's trusted the family because they refused to see their child as a bundle of deficits. But the lack of mutual trust among the wider school hierarchy poisoned the air; the parents had no place to voice their protests.

Professionals Must Cultivate a"Working Trust" With Families

Understanding and respect that lead to trust take effort to achieve, especially for families who belong to groups that traditionally feel less powerful or less comfortable in schools. School authorities need to trust that the parents not only know their children, but have a right to their own values. In Linda's case, some individuals in the school hierarchy, however, believed that it was educational abuse for her parents not to do everything possible to see that she learned to read. This divide may signal an irreconcilable difference. Parents who see their child as part of the family differ from the professionals whose primary concern is academic achievement. These positions represent two legitimately competing perspectives that, unfortunately, are complicated by power differences between parents and professionals. From the family perspective, the parent's right to be heard is not open to discussion so professionals must be willing to create an atmosphere for conversation and relationships.

In short, it is the professionals who must cultivate a reasonable degree of mutual trust. Call it a "working trust" when families and educators communicate easily and well. A working trust—teacher and parents do not have to become best friends—allows everyone to become more open about discussing problems, better able to explain what they mean, and less worried about offending each other. When disagreements arise, they have a better change to work out the human tangles. This ideal is one outcome of cultural interchange.

Side-by-Side Conversation is a Desirable Goal

Because parents have a responsibility to help teachers understand their views, there must be opportunities for conversation. Yet it is hard for families — especially outside the mainstream—to initiate that conversation. Diane initiated conversation by "chasing Emma down the hall," which worked better than writing, phoning, formal meetings, or any other of the multiple entry points that Diane offered. Had Emma and the school-based support team participated together in a conversation, the team might have come to recognize Emma's strengths and Emma might have come to see they had Linda's interests at heart. Or maybe a group conversation would give Emma an opportunity to hear the school's rationale for children doing their own assigned work and for the school to hear why assignments that require the family's collaborative effort might be beneficial to both mother and daughter (see footnote 14, p. 26). I am such a believer in group conversation that it is hard for me to grant that nothing Diane or the school could have done (that I can imagine) would have persuaded Emma to join a formal gathering. She and Gerry were strong parents, confident of their own beliefs, and not interested in group conversation.

Other parents in Diane's class felt differently about meeting. For the eight or so parents interested in gathering together each month, Diane used the formal processes developed by the Patricia Carini (Prospect, 1986) to initiate conversation, but many different collaborative forums work. When the atmosphere supports an obligation to speak openly and honestly, and parents and teachers can sit side-by-side to talk about what matters to them, possibilities emerge for creating a new school culture that recognizes the human variation, and at the same time, reduces the distance between home and school. Regular ongoing conversations allow parents and teachers to bridge the gap that usually separates "expert" school personnel from families who know their children best.

As parents and teachers gain a greater understanding of each other's perspectives, they develop stronger voices to articulate their own fears, knowledge, priorities, constraints, and concerns. Sitting side by side reduces school-home boundaries in that it provides an opportunity for both teachers and parents to come to understand how their attitudes include and exclude children and in what ways the school shows respect for the child and the parents.[15]

Responsiveness Requires Autonomy

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[15] A parent, Diane, and I wrote an unpublished paper about this work (Jervis, Mullins, Stern, 1998): "In the Face of My Resistance: Stephanie's Parent and Teacher Gain a Working Trust."

The system—more rigid than is good for families and children especially those form outside the mainstream—needs to bend. Responsiveness requires more teacher autonomy and more reliance on teacher judgment. Or else the system becomes a vise that whomps children and their families, squeezing them into a standard shape that contradicts the reality of human variation.

Encouraging Cultural Knowledge: A Dilemma and a Challenge

Knowing cultural information is rare; teachers often act without it. The teacher as ethnographer is a worthy response to the challenge of building on the diverse cultures in the classroom ((Mehan, Lintz, Okamoto, Wills, 1995), but cultural interchange depends on more than careful observation, an open mind, and specific knowledge or facts, though all those are welcome. Teachers need to develop the habit of thinking about children's cultures, noticing patterns, building up evidence to anchor their impressions, sharing their conclusions with one another, and examining their own attitudes. This exhortation to dig deeply into culture, however, competes with inducements to keep our eyes on the child. Teachers cannot be held accountable to know what I as a researcher found out.

To be open to cultural nuances is hard when we are unaware of what cultural differences are salient to the students and their parents. Because Diane's approach tends to be highly attuned to individual differences, her vision mostly accommodated to variation. But detecting family differences which counter the usual school values—like learning to read—is a formidable task and a major challenge.

Further Thoughts on Cultural Interchange

Some might argue (and have argued) that Diane's class involves little cultural interchange since her own unconflicted values prevail and she does not create a classroom *de nova* each year from among the families who bring so many deep—and varied—cultural resources. True enough. Rather her values lead to a classroom that eases school for children and includes them in an expanding, expansive community where they find a place to belong. To increase mutual understanding among children, she exposes them to other perspectives in order to widen their own; she responds to individuals, but relishes their interdependence. She provides entry points and welcomes parents to engage in school life and contribute in whatever way they can. Diane's classroom is one form of cultural interchange as we envisioned it.

Persistent Blinders

There are other versions and I struggle to hear them. Aside from not knowing the initial dimensions of what we were looking for, we didn't know how this slippery process of interchange would affect our own perspectives. It turned out that becoming aware of own cultural lenses that operate involuntarily below the surface of consciousness was more arduous than we thought. Opposing themes of openness and narrowness persist. Habits of mind and habits of looking are embedded in the study like fool's gold in a hunk of pyrite. Even when mined and exposed to the open air, old ways of perceiving the world fade slowly, if at all. Deeply held values do not change easily; nor perhaps, should they.

When I look out over a classroom or a parent group I now imagine that they are as different from me as I am from the participants in this study, including my colleagues on the research team. This major personal learning from the project gives me some notion of how far we have to go in making school comfortable places for *all* students and their families.

A task, then, is to hear the other voices and reflect with openness on what changes one can live without abandoning core values, or as some might say, blinders. My personal blinder causes me to identify (some have said over-identify) with Diane's perspective. I have a visceral response to the special education evaluation procedures and the attitudes behind them.

There is another side that I profess to be willing to hear, but it challenges my basic values. Perhaps Diane's "easing" school may also make school too "easy." Perhaps I ignored the opportunities she missed for pushing Linda toward formal academics. The result is that I have built into this study a defense of Diane's version of progressive education. I believe that progressive principles—rethought for today's diverse classrooms—have a better chance to improve learning for children outside the middle class mainstream than increased reliance on standards imposed from a distance and high stakes standardized tests that produce winners (usually white) and therefore losers (disproportionately people of color). But, some say, I can afford to take this position since I and my children already live within the white power structure. It is a dilemma that has the capacity to shift my whole way of seeing the world. I have not resolved it.

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