

## Home-School Collaboration in Sweden and China\*

Margaretha Kristoffersson, Limin Gu  
Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

Yan Zhang  
Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

This article is a working paper presenting a network building cooperative project between Umeå University in Sweden and Zhejiang University in China. The project focuses on parents' involvement and home-school collaboration in Sweden and China and has an ambition to entail a set of empirical objectives: (1) to map and compare the systems, policies, curricula, and resources dealing with home-school collaboration in Sweden and China at the national level; (2) to identify and analyze the similarities and differences in the definitions, foci, models, practices, and perspectives on home-school collaboration in the two countries at the local level; and (3) to identify and seek out good examples and models from both countries for communication and interaction among teachers, parents, and students. Following an introduction to the project design where a comparative case-study approach is presented, this article reviews policies and researches concerning home-school collaboration in Swedish and Chinese contexts. Cases from both countries are selected, described, and discussed. Relative issues for further study are suggested.

*Keywords:* home-school collaboration, parental involvement, comparative case studies, Sweden, China

### Introduction

Ever since compulsory schooling was introduced, ideas and opinions about collaboration between home and school have been examined from different political and societal interests with a number of objectives (OCED (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), 2006). This field has been given increased emphasis in Sweden during recent decades. Changes in educational policies have provided and extended the opportunities and rights for parents to be involved in and have influence on education and school arrangements. It is argued that one of the fundamental conditions improving the quality of education should be home-school collaboration, which is based on the democratic values of the society. The Swedish National Agency stresses the importance of parents' participation in decision-making concerning their children and school management, as well as their-role as resource persons in school (Lpo. 94, 1994; Lgr. 11, 2011).

In China, collaboration between home and school has been emphasized recently, and it is regarded as a difficult but an important task. Historically, there had been a long tradition based on the Confucian idea of respect for teachers, which used to be expressed in the absolute power of teachers not only over pupils, but also over parents. Today, however, this tradition has been influenced by the market-oriented economy and modern western culture. There is a growing tendency for parents' and pupils' democratic consciousness to be reinforced and collaboration between home and school to be promoted. For instance, some organizations, such as parents

---

\*The project is financed by STINT, the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education. Margaretha Kristoffersson, Ph.D., senior lecturer, Department of Education, Umeå University. Limin Gu, Ph.D., senior lecturer, Department of Education, Umeå University. Yan Zhang, Ph.D., associated professor, City College, Zhejiang University.

committees and parent schools have been set up in recent years.

Internationally, previous researches have provided evidence of the positive correlations between parents' active engagement in their children's schooling and better outcomes and behavior of their children in school (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Epstein, 2001; Erikson, 2009; Högdin, 2006; Ravn, 2005). They found that parental involvement has a positive effect on children who take more pleasure in school activities, and a more positive climate results in the classroom with a higher level of interest and approval of work done by the students. Better academic results are achieved when there are open channels between home and school.

Although home-school partnership is the intended image from a political perspective, teachers in schools are uncertain of their roles, perhaps seeing a changed role as a threat to their professional status. At the same time, there has been official apprehension about the role of parents in school improvement. Parents are not a homogenous group, and their activities are influenced by their social, cultural, and economic circumstances that could be a challenge for home-school collaboration (David, 2003; Ravn, 2005). From this point of view, the democratic role of schooling could be undermined by the inclusion and exclusion of parents.

Home-school collaboration is an important but complex issue that needs to be investigated and comprehended both broadly and in-depth by setting it into different contexts as well as from various perspectives. A cross-cultural comparative study in this field could contribute to identifying and analyzing the similarities and/or differences in policies and practices, and to discussing the possibilities, difficulties, and strategies for policy implementation and strategies concerning home-school collaboration at the local level, school level as well as individual level. Sweden and China have different traditions, social systems, and values that have had an impact on policy and school practices for home-school collaboration. Investigations and policy measures from these two different cultural contexts could offer valuable lessons and experiences to each other. It could establish indicators for appropriate home-school collaboration and a set of best practices for guidance for both countries.

### **The Home-School Collaboration Project**

This network building cooperative project between Umeå University in Sweden and Zhejiang University in China focuses on parents' involvement and home-school collaboration in Sweden and China. The main aim of this project is to build up a research network between two universities to promote internationalization of higher education in both countries<sup>1</sup>. A number of researchers from each university are involved in the network research group.

#### **Objectives of the Project**

As related to the main aim, the project has also an ambition to entail a set of empirical objectives: (1) to map and compare the systems, policies, curricula, and resources dealing with home-school collaboration in Sweden and China at the national level; (2) to identify and analyze the similarities and differences in the definitions, foci, models, practices, and perspectives on home-school collaboration in the two countries at the local level; and (3) to identify and seek out good examples and models from both countries for communication and interaction among teachers, parents, and students. The project started in October 2010 and will continue until June 2013. This article describes how far the process has come right now and should be seen as a contribution to the future development of the project. In the following, we are going to present the preliminary

---

<sup>1</sup> The project is financed by STINT, the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education.

findings with a focus on national policies on home-school collaboration in Sweden and China; research on home-school collaboration practice in both countries; and the cases from Sweden and China that are chosen for discussion.

### Design of the Project

The project builds on a structure designed to select samples for a multiple comparative case study (Yin, 1993) where analyses and comparisons among the selected cases in Sweden and China are carried out. The structure, which is adapted from the model described in Agency for School Improvement (2008), comprises two dimensions. One is focusing on the individual students. It could be formal, such as an individual plan, or informal, such as a dialogue. The other is the collective, where the parents are in the focus. It could be formal, such as parent meetings and the local school board; or informal, such as parent support for children's learning. Figure 1 shows the four quadrant structure of home-school collaboration for Swedish and Chinese school contexts, which was used to select cases for this project. The Swedish cases feature parents and the local school board as supports in children's learning and schooling, which represents the collective formal respective collective informal quadrants; the Chinese cases provide examples of family education and parent representatives that could be positioned in the collective formal quadrant. The selected cases within the project will be presented in later section of this article.

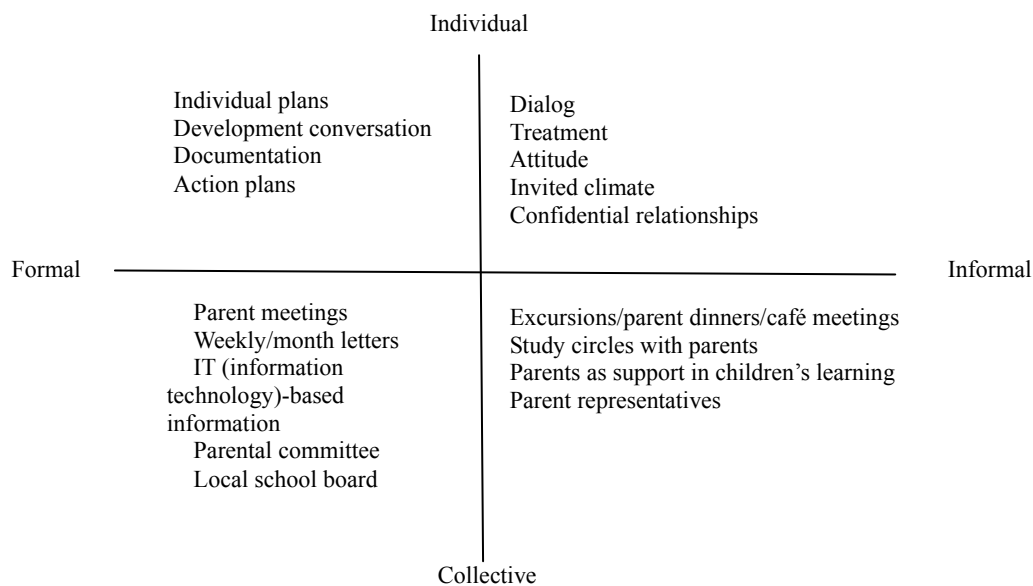


Figure 1. Home-school collaboration (adapted from Agency for School Improvement, 2008, authors' translation). Two dimensions of home-school collaboration used for selecting cases.

## National Policies on Home-School Collaboration in Sweden and China

### Policies in Sweden

The current national curriculum for compulsory education in Sweden has been in effect since 1994 (Lpo. 94, 1994). A new curriculum for the compulsory school, the pre-school class, and the leisure-time center was issued in 2011 (Lgr. 11, 2011). Both curricula provide a statement of educational fundamental values, basic objectives, and guidelines. According to the curricula, the school has two missions: one is to promote learning by stimulating the individual to acquire knowledge; the other in partnership with the home, is to promote the

development of students into responsible persons and members of society. In a deeper sense, education and upbringing, hand in hand, seek to transfer values, traditions, language, and knowledge from one generation to the next. In line with government regulations, the school has a responsibility for students' knowledge and social development that require real functioned collaboration between school and home, a need that is clearly stated in national curriculum documents (Lpo. 94, 1994; Lgr. 11, 2011).

School activity shall be developed in correspondence with the goals that have been set out in the law and the curriculum. School principals have a clear responsibility in this respect. They are responsible to ensure that collaboration between home and school is well organized and developed and that parents receive information on the school's goals, working methods, and the range of choice that exists. Teachers are expected to work together with the parents and continuously provide them with information concerning the students' school situation, well-being, and acquisition of knowledge. This daily pedagogical leadership and professional responsibility for teachers are necessary conditions for the quality development of the school. They call for a constant examination of learning goals, follow-up and evaluation of results, as well as testing and developing of new methods. This kind of work has to be carried out in active collaboration between staff and students and in close contact with the home and the local community. Twice a year, the school has an obligation to invite all parents and students to an "individual development dialogue" where they meet with teachers to discuss students' academic progress, experiences of school life in general, and their own schooling in particular, as well as plan regarding how best to meet students' individual study needs (Lpo. 94, 1994; Lgr. 11, 2011).

The opportunities and scope for parents to influence education shall be real. Consequently, these opportunities are required both at the political level (state and municipality) and at the local school level (Ds, 2009:25). The national policy is supported by the school law which expresses students' right to influence their school work. For parents, however, there is no clear statement in the school law. Instead, parents' influence is limited to the obligation for the principal to inform and consult as stated in the school regulations. This means that the formal opportunity for parental influence is only to choose a school they prefer—a small freedom of choice that exists only in the larger municipalities that can offer this kind of alternatives. At present, a general legal provision about parents' influence in education is provided in the new curriculum effective since 2011, which states that teachers have the responsibility to plan, implement, and evaluate education along with the students. The opportunity for students and parents to influence education and a forum for consultation shall be implemented at each preschool and school, although schools that are governed by a board with student and parent representatives are not obliged to also have a forum for consultation. The new school law requires that a school with a local school board shall have equal numbers of students and parents members on the board, which means a change from earlier when parents were the majority on the local school board (Ds, 2009:25; School Law, 2010:800).

### **Policies in China**

Research on home-school collaboration in China started relatively recently. Under the influence of western countries, home education has become a hot issue of educational reform studies. Issued in 2001 by the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the "Decision on the Reform and Development of Elementary Education" clearly stipulates that school education should put morality education at a primary position in quality education, arming people with scientific theories, guiding them with lofty spirits, inspiring them with fine works, thus, setting up schools as an important position of civilization construction. Prominence is given to

home education. School should build a stable connection with parents by family visit and strengthen instruction home education, helping parents to form the correct educational concepts for the purpose of creating an appropriate family environment for children's growth.

The 2004 statement "Some Suggestions on Further Strengthening and Improving Minors' Ideological and Moral Construction" by the State Council of the People's Republic of China (2004), again, emphasizes the importance of collaboration between home education and school education by stressing that home education plays a specially important role in minors' ideological and moral construction. Home education should integrate with school education and societal education. Women's federations at all levels, education administration departments, as well as primary and secondary schools should take the responsibility of instructing and promoting home education. They should collaborate with communities, establish parent schools, and spread knowledge about home education and successful experiences with it. Various kinds of home-education academic communities should be brought into full use. They should launch research aiming at the existing problems in home education and provide theoretical support and a decision basis in guiding the work of home education.

### **Research on Home-School Collaboration in Sweden**

In recent decades, several researchers have become interested in investigating the status quo of home-school collaboration as practiced in the Swedish context, trying to understand this phenomenon from different actors' perspectives, such as those of teachers', students', and parents'. For instance, a study about teachers' contacts with parents was conducted by Erikson (2009) who was interested in finding out what teachers actually think and do when they establish a confidential relationship with parents. A total of 1,336 teachers in Swedish compulsory schools participated in two surveys. The major result of the study was that teachers had positive attitudes towards home-school collaboration, though there were differences in how teachers experienced, understood, established, and developed the contact with the parents across teacher categories, such as Grades 1–3 teachers, Grades 4–6 teachers, and Grades 7–9 teachers. First, although all teachers took initiatives to contact parents, the ways they did so varied between the teachers in lower grades and those in higher grades. Teachers in lower grades contacted parents more often and spontaneously in face-to-face meetings, while teachers in higher grades preferred to use telephone or e-mail to contact parents. Second, teachers in Grades 7–9 experienced parental contact as more "demanding" or "stressful" than the teachers in Grades 1–6 did. Partly, this was because face-to-face contact might have contributed to a better understanding and relationship between teachers and parents. Another reason could be that the formal assessment and marking system applied in Grades 7–9 caused the teachers to experience much more pressure from parents. Third, regarding teachers' expectations of parents' responsibility for their children's schooling, more teachers in Grades 7–9 than in other categories would like to see more active engagement of parents in their children's schooling than it is the situation today. Briefly, it seems that teachers in lower grades have more positive experiences of parental contact than teachers in higher grades, and physical contact (face-to-face) is reported as being more effective than in other ways. However, Erikson (2009) argued that the different experiences among teachers in lower grades and higher grades could also be explained as a result of changed conditions in home-school collaboration, such as the development of autonomy of the children with respect to the relationship with their parents.

The experiences of parents concerning home-school collaboration were examined by Andersson (2004),

based on interviews with 40 parents of 11–12 years old children. The research focused on parents' experience of their children's school situation and collaboration with teachers, and how the child's school situation influences their home situation. Her findings indicated that there were both positive and negative experiences among the parents. Usually, when things were going well with the child in school the parent was more positive. The positive experiences were related to well-established communication and contact with the teachers who were characterized by "having time", "being open and honest", and the parent felt respected. The negative aspects were often related to the situation when things were not going well with the child in school. These could be for example a delay in contact from the school regarding the child's social difficulties; and child's learning difficulties were ignored/neglected in school, etc.. It is also reported that the parents had limited influence, and the prestige and defensiveness of the teacher could be a factor as well. The study concluded that, for parents, to be informed in time, respected, and listened to by teachers were important conditions for their active participation and engagement in children's schooling, as well as for an effective home-school collaboration.

As Swedish society becomes more multicultural, the education system is facing extensive challenges. It is argued that school has not been able to cope with all aspects of equality. Most exposed are the students with a foreign background. Generally, their parents have lower educational level, lower income, and less opportunity of contact with the labor market than families with both parents born in Sweden. Segregation, decentralization, diversification, and individualization are pointed out as four possible factors that together may explain why Swedish students have a lower ranking in international comparisons now than during the early 1990s (Skolverket, 2009). Support from home has become more important for students' potential to achieve good results, because the school has not been able to compensate for students' social background and different conditions (Skolverket, 2009). With this background in mind, researchers observed that political decisions play an important role in influencing the equality and quality of education (Johansson, Paci, & Hovdenak, 2004; Johansson, 2007).

In Johansson's (2007) study on parental involvement in Sámi schools, the invisible existence of cultural-based school practice and curriculum texts, as well as the lack of contact among homes, schools, and community culture was obvious. She argued that this was an issue not only for Sámi schools, but also for state schools because of the growth of a multicultural society in Sweden (Johansson, 2009). In the same direction, Bouakaz (2007) has studied how parents of Arabic ethnic background and the students' teachers view parental involvement in school. The result revealed that these parents had limited knowledge of the Swedish school system but did show an interest and would like to draw closer to the school. Barriers, such as language, cultural, and religious factors were mentioned by the teachers. Efforts to involve parents, according to Bouakaz, are thus facing problems in terms of power, class, ethics, and institutional differences. Bouakaz (2007) remarked that not much of what children did at home or the values from their own culture had been considered to be of importance at school. The result of his study indicated that home culture and school culture were two different worlds that should both be considered when working with parental involvement.

### **Research on Home-School Collaboration in China**

Research studies on the current situation and practices of home-school collaboration in China are numerous. They mainly focus on studying the specific forms of collaboration, such as establishing parent schools, parent reception days, parent-teacher associations, and regular home visit. In their paper "Constructing Morality Education Overpasses", Yang, Feng, and Li (2001) proposed two ways to realize home-school

collaboration: establishing parent schools and setting up parent committees. Researchers provide a more specific introduction to the practices of home-school collaboration. First, by establishing parent schools, schools could teach parents scientific education concepts and common skills in education regularly; Second, teachers should visit those students who have family problems to bring more harmony to their family relationships, uniting the forces of school education and home education; Third, schools should be open to parents regularly for them to better know their children's performances in school and thus carry out more directed education; and Fourth, students and parents should learn together and help each other, aiming at constructing a family learning environment (Gao & Li, 2007; Li, S. Wang, & X. Wang, 2001; Pan, 2001; Shi, 2001; Zhang, 2001; Zhang & Wang, 2002). Chen and Li (2003) stated that school education and home education were indivisibly connected to each other and school-based management could effectively combine school education and home education.

In another paper, Yan and Qian (2006) gave a specific description of how to carry out school-based management. The main focus was on carrying out a series of programs and activities to get parents involved in students' learning and in school management. The home-school network mainly functioned by collecting and analyzing students' home information and school information, studying the school's and the home's role in coordinating ideological and moral education, studying the effect of students' self-education and interaction with partners in morality education, and probing paradigms and cases of family education.

### **Cases of Sweden**

#### **Homework**

In Sweden, homework is one area that has been emphasized in order to closely study parents' involvement in their children's schooling. Parents' engagement and support are regarded as being crucial for their children's academic outcomes and behavior in school. However, during the past several years, there has been increased discussion and reflection on the negative consequences attributed to homework in Swedish debates on education, where it is argued that homework has caused stress of students, tensions, and conflicts between students and their parents, and probably, extended the gaps among students' performance because of their different family backgrounds in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, and school culture, etc. (Gu & Kristoffersson, 2010). There is an absence of reflection from teachers on whether and in what way the existing homework practice in Swedish schools improves children's learning and embodies the desired social implications. The study also indicated that many teachers had high expectations of parent' engagement and support in homework; but it also reported that it was difficult to realize in practice, due to parents' limited knowledge, competence, and time, as well as other obstacles, such as lack of communication concerning homework between teachers and parents (Gu & Kristoffersson, 2012). Recently, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of private companies who provide homework assistance for families, and this could be a new research field for further investigation in terms of the inequality of education.

#### **Local School Board**

Local school boards of compulsory schools in Sweden are another area of concern for home-school collaboration and parental involvement. The government has endeavored to increase parental influence in schools by passing a resolution establishing a pilot scheme entitled "Local School Boards with an Elected Parent Majority in Compulsory School and Compulsory Special Schools". The trial period started July 15, 1996

and ran until June 30, 2001. This has been extended four times: 2003, 2007, 2008, and 2009. Since 2011, it has been up to each school to decide whether a school will to permanent a local school board or not. However, it was argued that implementing local school boards in Sweden and many other countries was problematic. This could be seen in terms of the generally weak interest in boards and in the top-down rather than bottom-up character of this state initiative. For instance, many parents reported that they had no spare time to serve on boards and that, furthermore, they had insufficient influence on the work of the boards (Kristoffersson, 2008).

The implementation of a board with parental involvement was designed to have a positive effect on local democracy, but some studies have revealed many problems in relation to the boards (Kristoffersson, 2002; 2005; 2007). One problem related to communication between the parents on the boards and parents who were not members of the boards. Another problem was that the schools had “contact parents” in each group of students but their role lacked clarity. Likewise, students on the board had difficulty in taking part in the work of boards. Furthermore, communication between the board, the school, and the parents outside the board was complex. Another general issue was that different constituencies on the board were not, in many cases, satisfactory balanced. While neoliberal tendencies regarded parents as the most important constituency on a board, it was difficult to reconcile the interests of individual parents and the collective interest of all parents. Accordingly, there was a built-in complexity which allowed individual interests to predominate. While parents as board members could influence decisions, their responsibilities and rights on the board were not clearly specified. Parent representatives felt uncertain in their decision-making.

### **Cases of China**

There are two levels of home-school collaboration in Hangzhou, China. Hangzhou is the capital city of Zhejiang Province, which is located in the south eastern China. It takes the leading role in home-school collaboration in the province. The collaboration system focuses on two initiatives: the Headquarter Campus of Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School, which was founded by the Hangzhou Educational Bureau, and a semi-official organization and the practice of schools in Hangzhou city, focusing on a junior high school in Grades 7–9.

#### **Headquarter Campus of Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School**

The Headquarter Campus of Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School is located in Hangzhou Xuejun Senior High School, which is one of the top three secondary schools in Hangzhou. Campus was set up on June 16, 2000, by the Hangzhou Educational Bureau as a special organization to take charge of the instruction of family-school education (Han, 2005). For 12 years now, the school has operated efficiently in this field of instruction and practice through the following six initiatives according to Han (2006).

**Three-level instruction network.** To make the instruction of family-school education more scientific and standardized, and at the same time reflect the individuation of different districts and different schools, the school education system of Hangzhou built a three-level instruction network: the “city headquarter campus”, the “district/county(city) branch campus”, and the “school instruction station”. All levels have unified principle requirements as well as individual features. They work independently at their own levels and cooperate effectively at unified levels.

**Teachers group.** The family education instruction teachers group consists of special staff from the Hangzhou Education Science Research Centre. These are experienced teachers who are keen on the research



and practice of family education instruction for schools and excellent parents. The teachers group is in charge of the training of teachers for parent schools, consultation service to parents, and compilation of teaching and reading materials for parent schools.

**“Dior” family education instruction hotline 88825885.** Setting up by the Hangzhou Education Science Research Centre Institute on June 16, 2004. The “Dior” family education instruction hotline 88825885 is another public welfare consultation hotline similar to the “students’ mental health hotline 87025885”. The hotline works from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. from Monday to Friday, with members of the family education instruction teachers group as being the consultants.

**Hot issues research team.** To acquire timely knowledge of parents’ needs, the headquarter campus has a research team consisting of head teachers, teacher trainers, students, and professional scientific researchers to study hot issues and problems in family education and family education instruction. For example, it has conducted the studies: “Research of the family education situation of excellent students”, “Family communication research”, “Research on parent resources for youths’ sexual health”, and so on.

**Wise parents classes.** To inform parents of their children’s development at different stages, the headquarter campus set up the “wise parents” classes and “green apple” classes, which have specific course series and are taught by special teachers. The “wise parents” classes mainly teach knowledge about psychology and pedagogy while the “green apple” classes teach mainly about sexual health in youth.

**Hangzhou family education Website.** The Hangzhou Family Education Society launched the Hangzhou family education Website (Retrieved from <http://www.cnjztd.com>) on June 16, 2006. The Headquarter Campus of Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School hosts six features: “Mrs. Han’s mailbox”, parents salon, hotline memoir, wise classes, video school, and Sifang forum. The parent school’s work has received support from school teachers and expressions of trust from many parents. It was named the “National Family Education Experiment and Research Base” by Chinese Family Education Committee.

#### **“Parents’ Spokesman” System in Hangzhou**

Under the recent “open-door” model of running schools, a continuing research project has been on how to improve the quality and level of schools and create the best learning environment for students’ development with the help of parents. Based on this model, Hangzhou Zhaohui Middle School, together with the parents’ committee, was the first to put forward the “parents’ spokesman” system in March 2004. As we know, a spokesman is a person who speaks on behalf of a certain social class or group. So, a “parents’ spokesman” is someone who, on behalf of all the parents of a class, speaks directly with the school. Any parents in the group can reflect problems or put forward suggestions to the school through the parents’ spokesman without worrying that the school may think badly of them since the spokesman would strictly observe the discipline of confidentiality (Report of Hangzhou Zhaohui Middle School, 2010).

**Operating mode of the “parents’ spokesman” system.** The school has tentatively developed an operating mode of the “parents’ spokesman” system, that is, at standard process involving the “democratic election of the spokesman—‘sincere talk’ between the school and the spokesman, teachers’ visit to the spokesman’s home, attendance of the spokesman at classes, and democratic discussion about the spokesman”. The objective of this process is to further improve the communication between the school and parents as well as improve the operation of school administration. The stages are as follows:

- (1) Democratic election of the spokesman. The school has made every September the “democratic election

of the spokesman month” since 2005. At the very beginning of every school year, the school informs every parent that those who would like to volunteer to apply to the school to be the “parents’ spokesman” should make a candidate a speech, after which the official spokesman would be elected by a democratic vote of the parents;

(2) Regular sincere talks between the school and the spokesman. During the sincere talks, school leaders introduce the spokesman to the emphasis of recent work and main activities of the school as well as listening to the spokesman’s useful advice. Through these activities, the aim is to build a bridge of home-school collaboration and achieve consistency in home-school education;

(3) Visit to the spokesman’s home. At weekends and during their spare time, a core team of teachers led by head teacher visits the spokesman’s home. They discuss with him/her about his/her child’s performance at school, ask him/her about the child’s performance and ideological situation at home; they also ask him/her advice for their teaching and instruct him/her how to conduct family education;

(4) Attendance of the spokesman at classes. The spokesman has the right to know about school education. He/she can attend any class on any school day without informing the teacher in advance. He/she can also write his opinion in the “attending class feedback form”, thus, practicing this new form of parent-school interaction;

(5) Democratic discussion about the spokesman. After the spokesman has performed his/her work for a period of time, the school and the other parents will hold a discussion about his/her work; the purpose of this is to oversee his/her work, letting him/her represent other parents, better perform his/her duty, and enhance communication between school and parents.

**Rights and obligations of the parents’ spokesman.** After the spokesman for every class has been elected, they share certain rights and obligations:

(1) Each spokesman should read out his/her obligations and the strict code of confidentiality at a school parents’ meeting. He/she should also provide his/her postal address and cell phone number to all parents;

(2) When any parent has suggestions for the school or the teachers but does not want to speak to them directly, the parent and student may refer to the parents’ spokesman and he/she will speak directly to the school or the teachers;

(3) The spokesman is responsible for collecting and providing information about educational resources from and to parents, as well as helping and supervising the standard running of the school;

(4) There are many ways for the spokesman to reflect problems to the school, such as making phone calls, sending e-mails, filling in opinion and suggestion cards and putting them into the headmaster’s mailbox, or directly talking with the school or teachers.

Education is not only the concern of schools and teachers, but also the concern of parents. Making full use of the parents’ spokesman resource could enable the integration of various activities of social power into school education. It could thus be a good way to improve the quality and level of running schools. The result is that parents become the administrators of schools and students feel that “school is more like home”. The parents’ spokesman system enables the spokesmen to involve themselves in the administration of schools on behalf of all the parents. It could be more powerful than the force of individual parents acting alone and enables the school administration to better realize student-orientation.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Comparing the Swedish and Chinese cases selected in this project, there are some interesting and

important aspects that are highlighted and need to be further studied. On policy level, both countries emphasize and demand parental involvement in education and home-school collaboration. The school law and the national curriculum are the important policy documents for Swedish education system which guarantee the democratic processes. Active parental participation in these processes is regulated and required by the policy documents in which the democratic values are stressed (Lpo. 94, 1994; Lgr. 11, 2011; School Law, 2010:800). In one sense, home-school collaboration is encouraged and implemented in two-way directions based on a sense of equality between home and school. The Chinese policies focus on the important role of school-home collaboration for the morality development of students. Home education and parent schools are encouraged that put schools and educators into a leading position in guiding parents to create an appropriate family environment for children's growth (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001; 2004). In both countries, despite the difficulties and obstacles in practice, the ideology regarding home-school collaboration is that parents should not be considered as a pedagogical problem but to be regarded as valuable resources for the school to be able to carry out its commission to bring up students to be democratic and moral citizens.

In Swedish context, the majority of teachers and parents have a positive attitude toward policies and strategies of home-school collaboration. Previous researches indicate that there are many good examples and experiences that provide evidence for the importance and advantages of home-school collaboration. Information, respect, and understanding are crucial aspects for a well-functioning collaboration between home and school (Andersson, 2004; Erikson, 2009). However, research also indicates that in some cases the schools have not been able to cope with all aspects of the democratic process and the schools have not worked sufficiently with the issue of equality. Parental contact seems to decrease with age of the students (Andersson, 2004). Furthermore, not many of parents' and students' cultural values from home are considered to be important for school. Home and school cultures are increasingly different worlds. Segregation, decentralization, diversification, and individualization are pointed out as areas of concern. Parents, students, and teachers should work in a context of knowledge and cultural heritage and look upon diversity in education as a rich resource (Johansson, 2009).

In a more critical sense, the case of implementation of local school boards with parents in the majority in Sweden has not met with any major success (Kristoffersson, 2008). Parents experience that they do not have as much influence as they assumed. There are decisions that are not implemented or followed up. The work of the school board is demanding of time, and parents find that they often do not have that time. In order to reach out to other parents across the whole school there must be good communication between board and parents outside the board. Since 2011, schools have been able to choose whether or not to have a local board, but it is obligatory that all schools have parent councils. More research looking into the process and consequences of the new policy and its implementation is needed.

The "parents' spokesman" system in China infuses new blood into school educational reform. This is an interesting actor in the school system which is not observable in Sweden. The spokesmen come from various fields, such as hospitals, banks, universities, etc.. They actively try to put forward suggestions for school education, thus becoming fresh activists of school education. Spokesmen have bridged the platform between parents and schools as well as teachers. As a system to communicate parents' aspirations, the parents' spokesman protects some of the personal information about the parents, thus, allaying parents' fears that their opinions and suggestions might adversely influence their children's education, while also encouraging more parents to put forward more issues to discuss with the school and the teachers, thus overall playing an effective

promotional role in education. The system has eliminated the formalization disadvantages of parent committees and let the parents really become involved in school administration, thus, adding the wisdom of parents to the administration of the school. Finally, the “parents’ spokesman” system has also enlarged the teaching resources for school education.

However, in Chinese context, previous research also reports that there are many common deficiencies in the personality development of students in primary and secondary schools such as frailty, lack of independence, and social responsibility. Disparity between school education goals and family training orientation is an important cause of this phenomenon (Gu & Zhu, 2004). Hopefully, home-school collaboration could not just promote the physical and mental health of students, but also need to help parents receive lifelong education and help educators to know students better. The development of collaboration between home and school toward the integration of home, school, and society, from parental involvement in school education to social involvement in school education and from the cultivation of cooperative consciousness to the establishment of a cooperative system will ultimately facilitate the birth of an “education society”.

The issues surrounding the relationship between home and school are complex and not a neutral enterprise. Looking ahead, there are many questions remaining to be studied within this project. Among these, an important area for future study is the viewpoint of parents on the matter of parent councils in Sweden and the parents’ experiences of parental involvement initiatives in China. Students’, teachers’, and parents’ perspectives on homework in relation to parents’ involvement and home-school collaboration constitute another area demanding attention and study in both countries. More cases that present other areas in the four-quadrant structure of home-school collaboration (see Figure 1) could be necessary for further study. The model itself should also be reflected, adjusted, and developed under the changed social, cultural, technological, and educational conditions where new forms of home-school collaboration activities emerge, for example, the Web-based assessment system of “Unikom” in Swedish schools. Another central issue is the importance of listening to students’ own voices as co-creators of the social context where they live and act regarding the issue and activities of home-school relationship and collaboration. In discussions about home-school collaboration, even though children are critical actors in such activities, their own voices are often unheard. How to prepare students in teacher education programs to work with collaboration between home and school in their future careers is also an important theme to be investigated and discussed.

The significance and prospect of the Swedish and Chinese case study for further comparison is learning from examples and each other. Given the tendency toward critical thinking and the current globalisation trends, it is crucial that more investigations and understanding of issues of home-school collaboration should be set into cross-cultural contexts. This project is hopefully to contribute knowledge in this field, as well as to promote the democratic process of education in both countries.

## References

- Agency for School Improvement. (2008). *We leave the dearest we have to school... about cooperation with parents—A relationship that challenges*. Stockholm: Liber Distribution.
- Andersson, I. (2004). *Listen to the parents*. HLS Förlag.
- Bouakaz, L. (2007). Parental involvement in school: What hinders and what promotes parental involvement in an urban school. (Academic dissertation, Malmö Högskola, Malmö).
- Chen, J., & Shi, J. (2005). Positive interaction of morality education: New way of minors’ moral construction. *Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)*, 3, 114-118.

- Chen, N., & Li, D. (2003). On the characteristics and meaning of school-based management. *Journal of Educational Development*, 8, 47-50.
- Cooper, H., Robinson, J. C., & Patall, E. A. (2006). Does homework improve academic achievement? A synthesis of research 1987-2004. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(1), 1-69.
- David, M. (2003). Minding the gaps between family, home and school: Pushy or pressurized mummies? In S. Castelli, M. Mendel, & B. Ravn (Eds.), *School, family and community partnership in a world of differences and changes* (pp. 75-88). University of Gdansk.
- Ds. (2009:25). *The new school law—For knowledge, freedom of choice and safety*. Stockholm: Utbildnings Department.
- Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Erikson, L. (2009). *Teachers' contacts and collaboration with parents*. Örebro: Örebro Universitet.
- Gao, R., & Li, Y. (2007). Exploring new ways of class management through parent-teacher association. *Educational Science Research*, 7, 28-30.
- Gu, L., & Kristoffersson, M. (2010). "Home become school"—Students' perspectives on homework. In *Locus* (Vol. 4, pp. 52-67). Sweden: Stockholm Universitet.
- Gu, L., & Kristoffersson, M. (2012). Teachers' perspective on homework in Swedish elementary school. Conference paper at *NFPF/NERA Congress in Copenhagen*, March 8-10, 2012.
- Gu, Y., & Zhu, W. (2004). Home-school cooperation: The future of community education. *Journal of Qujing Normal College (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)*, 2, 96-99.
- Han, S. (2005). *Report of Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School*. Hangzhou: Hangzhou Educational Bureau Parent School Publishing.
- Han, S. (2006). *Moments of sense of accomplishment—100 "parents wisdom" stories* (pp. 101-102). Central Party Literature Press.
- He, W., & Yang, X. (2008). From choice to voice: The reversion of parents' role of educational right. *The Modern Educational Journal*, 2, 6-9.
- Högdin, S. (2006). Home resources: Young people's experience of parental support and involvement in their schooling. *Pedagogisk Forskning*, 11, 1-19.
- Jarl, M. (2004). *A school in democracy? Parents, community and the dialog*. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet (in Swedish).
- Johansson, G. (2007). *Cultural diversities in education* (Research Report. 2007: 05). Luleå, Sweden: Luleå University of Technology, Department of Education.
- Johansson, G. (2009). Parental involvement in the development of a culture based school curriculum. *Intercultural Education*, 20(4), 311-319.
- Johansson, G., Paci, C., & Hovdenak, S. (2004). Education (pp. 169-185). In *AHDR, Arctic Human Development Report*.
- Kristoffersson, M. (2002). *Parents involvement in compulsory school: A study of nine local boards with parents in majority in compulsory school*. Umeå, Sweden: Umeå University, Department of Education.
- Kristoffersson, M. (2005). Parental involvement: Parents' new role in Swedish schools. In G. Weiner (Ed.), *Social inclusion and exclusion, and social justice in education. Schriften der Pädagogischen Akademie des Bundes in Oberösterreich*, 29, 163-176.
- Kristoffersson, M. (2007). The paradox of parental influence in Danish schools: A Swedish perspective. In H. Phtiaka, & S. Symeonidou (Eds.), *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 1, 124-131. Retrieved March 21, 2013, from <http://www.ernape.net/ejournal/index.php/IJPE>
- Kristoffersson, M. (2008). *Local boards with parents in majority in compulsory school* (Academic dissertation, Umeå University, Department of Education, Sweden).
- Li, J., Wang, S., & Wang, X. (2001). Experiment on children's creativity development. *Journal of Shandong University (Social Science Edition)*, 6, 28-50.
- Liu, H. W., & Sun, Y. Y. (2001). Enlightenment of Singaporean morality education to Chinese education. *Education Science*, 1, 60-62.
- Long, X. (2004). Boosting ideological and moral construction of nonages in Beijing. *Front*, 6, 5-7.
- Lpo. 94. (1994). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre*. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.

- Lgr. 11. (2011). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre*. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). (2006). *Demand sensitive schooling? Evidence and issues, Schooling for tomorrow series*. Paris: OECD.
- Pan, X. (2001). Application of system theory in primary and secondary school administration. *Research of Elementary Education*, 1, 19-21.
- Ravn, B. (2005). An ambiguous relationship: Challenges and controversies in the field of family-school-community partnership, questioning the discourse of partnership. In R. Martinez-González, M. Henar Pérez-Herro, & B. Rodriguez Ruiz (Eds.), *Family-school-community partnerships: Merging into social development* (pp. 453-475). Oviedo: Grupo SM, Publica, Report of Hangzhou Zhaohui Middle School.
- School Law* (2010:800). Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Shenzhen Pinggang High School Project Team. (2001). Studying campus cultural landscape design. *Education Research*, 10, 43-47.
- Shi, Y. (2001). Ensuring students' healthy mentality and promoting quality education. *Chinese Education*, 17.
- Skolverket. (2009). *The Swedish National Agency for Education's current assessment report 2009: Organized pre-schooling, school-age childcare, compulsory school and adult education* (Report, 337). Stockholm: Skolverket.
- The State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2001). Decision on the reform and development of elementary education. *People's Daily*, 6, 15.
- The State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2004). Some suggestions on further strengthening and improving minors' ideological and moral construction. *People's Daily*, 2, 26.
- Wang, H. (2004). Head teachers should maintain good cooperation with parents. *Class Adviser*, 3, 9-11.
- Yan, S., & Qian, Y. (2006). On constructing home-supporting system of youth ideological and moral construction in the process of building a harmonious society. *Journal of the Party School of CPC Hangzhou*, 4, 82-87.
- Yang, L., Feng, J., & Li, Z. (2001). Constructing morality education overpasses. *Class Adviser*, 4, 6-9.
- Yin, R. K. (1993). Applications of case study research (2nd ed.). In *Applied social research methods series* (Vol. 34). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Zhang, G., & Wang, S. (2002). Exploring new ways of cultivating morality: Constructing "Five For" network and applying "triplet" evaluation. *Educational Science Research*, 2, 65.
- Zhang, J. (2001). Constructing an operating mechanism of school, home and society: Three integrations education network. *Journal of Xiangtan Normal College (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)*, 1, 72-76.
- Zhang, S. (2008). Human development and cultivation under quality education. Review of *The 20th Annual Conference of the Chinese Society of Education*. *Journal of Chinese Education*, 17, 11-14.
- Zhang, Z. (2001). On the causes and adjustment of low effectiveness of school morality education. *Educator*, 5, 9-11.