Home Visits: Teacher Reflections about Relationships, Student Behavior, and Achievement

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The weeks were dragging on and I still had not heard back from the parents of my new first grader who had just transferred to my school. The notes I'd sent home every couple of days were becoming more strongly worded. I needed to meet with the parents immediately to discuss their child's academic problems. After another week passed without a response, I approached the principal about personally visiting the child's

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> home since the parents were not responding to traditional methods of communication. Because of the "worrisome neighborhood address" the principal insisted that I take a colleague. I sent yet another note home informing the parents that I would be making a home visit; there was no response on the parents' behalf. We arrived on the appointed day and knocked on the door of the trailer. A surprised and apprehensive young mother answered the door, and after a brief introduction, she eagerly invited us inside. There on the incredibly small kitchen table was every note I had sent home! I admit my fury was hard to hide until she averted her gaze and quietly asked if I would read the notes to her. In a flash of instant knowing, I realized she was incapable of reading the notes! This one, very brief home visit altered forever my interaction with this little boy, and every child I taught thereafter. (R. Stetson, personal communication, 2009)

The Problem

The literature is sated with calls for more and better communication between home and school. Teachers believe that parents should be more involved, but seem at a loss as to how to make that happen, and parents often feel disconnected to their child's teacher and the school. Few would argue that it is the responsibility of classroom teachers to establish and build good relationships with parents. Building those positive relationships with parents may not always be easy, but the rewards have consistently shown to be worth the effort. The National Parent Teacher Association Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (2010) states, "Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform" (p. 17). Numerous research articles cite improvements in student behavior and academic success when something as simple as a home visit is implemented (Flessa, 2008; Learning First Alliance, 2010; National PTA 2010; Sandham, 1999; Wherry, 2009).

For many, even suggesting that teachers do "one more thing" for their most challenging student(s) is almost insulting. Teachers are expected to change curriculum at the whim of central administration, spend their own time and money on student or classroom materials, and bring all children up to grade-level competency in spite of individual deficiencies or home circumstances. To suggest that overworked and underappreciated teachers now include home visits as an extra expectation hardly seems fair, especially for students whose attitudes and behavior often reflect the least amount of effort or care about success in school.

So what exactly is meant by a home visit? Does it really mean asking teachers to go into the homes of their most problematic students? In a word, "Yes." It is probably not appropriate for every child in the class-

room, but it could have a significant and remarkable impact on those two or three students each year who come with the most challenging and fragile foundations for academic and behavioral success.

While there is wide agreement about the potential value of home visits, little is known about how one should be conducted or the objectives of such visits. Clearly, there is a lack of effective models for how teachers can develop the skills needed to make such visits productive. The purpose of this paper is to explore quantitative and qualitative findings on the effects of a single home visit on relationships between the teacher and parents, teacher-student relationships, student behavior, work habits, and academic achievement.

Review of the Literature

The importance of developing amicable teacher-parent relationships is irrefutable. Flynn and Nolan's (2008) extensive review of current literature on parental involvement clearly shows that children whose parents are involved with their schools do better academically, have fewer absences, are more willing to do their homework, have higher graduation rates, and feel more competent about their abilities. Speaking specifically about home visits, Quintana and Warren (2008) report that, "…parents, who at first were embarrassed with home visits, later indicated that these visits provided personal parent-teacher time for asking questions and sharing concerns" (p. 119). Jean Brooks (2006) states, "Because parent involvement influences a student's sense of the meaningfulness of school and increases students' commitment to school goals, it is essential that schools maintain connections with parents to encourage their involvement with their children's education" (p. 72).

If the literature shows that increased parental involvement positively impacts their child's academic performance (Jeynes, 2005) and behavior, then given the reluctance of some families to get involved, perhaps teachers could encourage more parental participation by taking the initiative and going to the homes of their most disengaged students. Building relationships that are trustworthy and valued by the teacher, parent/caregiver, and student involves the same characteristics that are required for all healthy relationships; effective communication, time, trustworthiness, sincerity, and patience. An added benefit of a positive parent-teacher-student relationship is that it improves the likelihood that students will be more successful in their academic achievements, social behaviors, and more likely to stay in school and develop into a competent adult (Brooks 2006; Chapman, 2003; Learning First Alliance, 2001).

Teachers, administrators, and policy makers at the state and na-

tional level are doing everything possible to make sure K-12 students achieve at the highest possible level. In all of this, developing strong parent-teacher partnerships has been seriously overlooked or minimized even though it has been repeatedly shown to have great potential for student academic and behavior improvement. Principals tend to point to the frenzy over state-mandated testing for not having the time to focus on parent involvement in the schools. However, looking just under the surface of this proclamation might reveal that even before this excuse there wasn't much attention paid to the real need for parental involvement (Flessa, 2008).

The most cited reason for a lack of involvement on behalf of parents is they are just too overwhelmed by the day-to-day responsibilities in their own complicated daily lives. Other reasons include parents feeling negative about their educational experiences or they feel intimidated. In some cases, barriers such as language and cultural differences may impede greater parental involvement (Flynn & Nolan, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, et al, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002).

On the other hand, teachers may be unwilling or hesitant to develop relationships with parents. Generally speaking, teachers, especially young or new teachers, are not taught how to communicate effectively with parents and they may not understand the significance of promoting parental involvement and its relationship to the academic and behavioral well-being of the child. Many teachers, both inexperienced and experienced, report feeling intimidated and sometimes even threatened by parents of problem students and they don't want to spend the extra time it requires to work with them (Broderick & Mastrilli 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Schweiker-Marra, 2000; Tichenor, 1997). However, making the extra effort to build relationships with parents can have enormous returns for the student. In a 2001 study conducted among third, fourth and fifth grade students in 71 elementary schools and published by the U. S. Department of Education (as cited in Wherry, 2009), researchers found that in schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents of low-achieving students, reading test scores grew at a rate 50 percent higher and math test scores at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

Design of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the effects of one home visit on teacher-parent relationships, teacher-student relationships, student behavior, work habits, and academic achievement in the classroom. This

research also documents the process used and the results gained by 60 elementary teachers who used home visits as an outreach program for positively impacting the educational lives of problematic students and improving relationships with parents and students.

Methodology

Sixty elementary teachers selected their most problematic student and his or her parents for participation in this study. The teachers agreed to arrange one home visit with the parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) of a student identified as having either academic and/or behavioral difficulties. The goals established for the home visit included:

- getting better acquainted,
- committing to regular communication, and
- developing common goals that targeted improvement in the child's behavior and/or academic performance.

Participants

Selection. The teachers involved in this study (N=60) were enrolled in a master's degree program in elementary education at a regional state university and were taking their first class, Diversity and Equity in Education. The focus of this course was the study of the range of student diversities represented in classrooms today, e. g., ethnicity, gender, English Language Learners, special education conditions, achievement, socio-economic status, aptitude, and behavior.

Teachers. The 60 Pre-K-6th grade teachers participating in the study all taught at various elementary schools within the same urban school district in North Texas. They had an average of five years of teaching experience and represented a variety of teaching assignments. Of the participating teachers 53% taught in regular Pre-K-3 classrooms (N=37), 27% taught in regular grade 4-6 classrooms (N=13), 25% taught in bilingual Pre-K-4 classrooms (N=15), 10% taught in special education classrooms (N=6), and 5% taught fine arts classes to multiple grade levels (N =3). The demographics of the teachers in this study was 65% White (N=39), 20% Hispanic (N=12), 8% African American (N=5) and 7% Asian (N=4).

Students. Each participating teacher selected one student as her case study (see Case Study Assignment below). The 60 students in this study closely reflected the school district's student demographics: 43% Hispanic, 28% White, 25% African American, and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander and 1% Native American. The percentage of students coded as economically

disadvantaged in this school district is 57% and the percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students was 18% (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Visiting the homes of students requires trust among all participants. Therefore, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the students and their families. Additional information about each student's home and family situation (i. e., citizenship status, parental marital status, custody arrangements, occupations, living conditions, incarcerated parents, etc.) was intentionally not included in this article.

Procedures

Case study assignment. The teachers collected all relevant data on each of the students in their classrooms (i. e., ethnicity, gender, English Language Learners, special education needs, achievement, socio-economic status, aptitude, and behavior) and analyzed the information to better understand the unique make up of their classrooms. Those data helped them complete the case study requirements and select just one student that was particularly challenging. Most teachers chose a child in their class who had behavior problems such as a negative attitude, poor motivation, or academic problems that might include inadequate work/study habits. The teachers thought that these types of problems might be most easily ameliorated by working with the parents. The case study was to include seven parts: (1) thorough description of the student, (2) an academic profile, (3) summary of the presenting problem, (4) report of the home visit, (5) goals established by the parent(s) and teacher, (6) a journal of interventions used by the teacher with this student, and (7) final reflections. The component of this case study project that was most notably different from most, and was the focus of this study, was the home visit.

To fulfill requirements for the case study, teachers agreed to arrange one home visit with their chosen family. Three goals were established for the home visit: (a) establish and strengthen a personal relationship with the family and the student; (b) identify behaviors and/or academic goals that both parents and teacher could work on, and; (c) establish a system that would encourage communication between teacher and parents on a regular basis.

Initial contact with parents. The teachers made their initial contact with the parents via a phone conversation that identified the reason for the call and introduced the topic of a home visit. The teachers quickly described the purpose for proposing a home visit, using parent friendly language such as, "I am so pleased to have (Cecilia) in my class this year and I would love to come to your house for a short visit so we could get better acquainted and share some of the things we can work

on together." A bilingual school colleague assisted when necessary if a language interpreter was needed to facilitate communication between the teacher and parent. As one might expect, most teachers felt quite anxious about actually going into the home of one of their students. During their university class sessions they discussed ways to reduce their anxiety, and all teachers agreed to arrange their home visits early in the semester to allow maximum time to address goals established during the meeting with the parents.

Home visits and goals. The home visits occurred weekdays after school and lasted about an hour, sometimes longer. Teachers who felt insecure or uncomfortable going alone were encouraged to take a colleague or a family member with them. If a translator was needed, teachers invited one of their bilingual colleagues to go along.

Goal 1: Building rapport. As an opener, teachers took something they could hand to the parents upon their arrival, such as a product the child completed in school or homemade cookies to share during the conversation. Interestingly enough, many of the parents prepared a treat as well to give to the teacher. Typically, the conversation began with informal talk about the child and the family. Teachers created a list of opening questions such as ages and interests of the other children in the family, how long they had lived there, hobbies, what the parents did for a living, and other questions of general interest. Teachers also shared personal information about themselves such as how long they had taught at their schools, why they love to teach their particular grade level or subject, and other interesting tidbits about their own families. Teachers were asked not to take notes during this portion of the conversation to avoid any sense of record keeping or concerns about confidentiality.

Goal 2: Developing common goals for the child. Eventually the teachers shifted the conversation to the second purpose of the visit; to develop one to three goals that the teacher and parents could agree to work on together to better ensure the child's success at school. Teachers asked the parents or caregivers which issues were particularly important or concerning to them. Teachers did take notes during this part of the visit and they worked together to narrow down concerns to one or two that had the greatest promise of improvement in the shortest period of time. In the majority of cases, parents were able to identify a specific behavior or problem such as homework noncompliance. This opened the door for teachers to bring up some ideas for creating a place inside the home where homework could be completed, setting up specific times for study before play, or requiring the child to show his/her completed work before he/she was free to do other activities.

When teachers had additional concerns for the student, they would mention one or two of the most important and ask for the parents help with strategies to improve those behaviors as well. A list of action steps were generated that parents could use at home and the teacher could use at school. The objective of each teacher was to leave the home visit with one to three specific goals that everyone would target for the next several weeks.

Goal 3: Establishing a communication system. Toward the end of the visit, teachers and parents exchanged ideas about the best ways to contact each other. It may have been home or cell phone numbers, work numbers, and/or email addresses. Teachers encouraged parents to contact them any time they needed or wanted to communicate. One of the interesting discoveries for many teachers was the large number of families with home computers and internet access even in presumed high poverty areas. This was a welcome sign due to the fact that communicating via email is fast and efficient. It also increases the likelihood of a parental response. Based on class discussions, the researchers suspect cell phones with text messaging capabilities are also being underutilized as a major strand of communication with parents, but that topic is beyond the scope of this study.

Post project survey of teachers. Three months after the initial contact with parents in their homes, the teachers reunited in class to share their experiences. They were asked to complete a five-question Likert-type survey that rated the effects of their one home visit on (a) teacher-parent relationships, (b) teacher-student relationships, (c) student behavior and attitude in the classroom, (d) student work habits, and (e) academic achievement. The Likert choices were: 0 = negative effect; 1 =no effect; 2 = minimally positive effect; 3 = moderately positive effect; and 4 = extremely positive effect.

Results

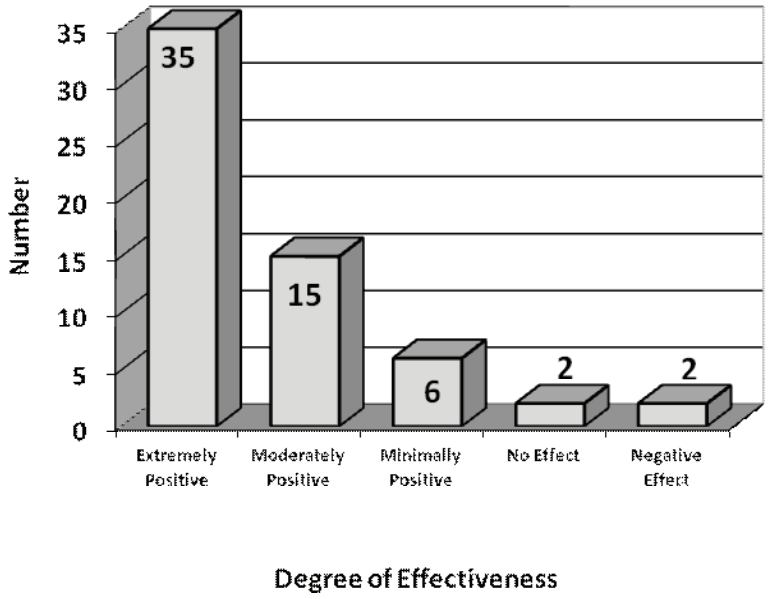
Home visitation. Although the teachers in this study had ample experience interacting with parents, none had ever made a home visit and all of them were anxious to do so. The teachers stated they felt uneasy and even intimidated by the thought of going into neighborhoods completely unfamiliar to them. Considering this large school district of which 72% of students are minorities, and 57% are considered economically disadvantaged, the vast majority of teachers admitted they just did not feel comfortable, or in some situations or neighborhoods, even safe. Likewise, teachers reported some parents admitted, once a comfortable relationship was established, that they felt intimidated and sometimes

suspicious about the teacher's request for a home visit. They often immediately assumed that their child must have been in serious trouble.

Home visits and improved relationships. Figure 1 presents the results of the teachers' perceptions about the effects of the home visit on their relationships with parents. A strong majority (N=50, 84%) of the 60 teachers in this study reported that the home visit had an extremely positive to moderately positive effect on their relationship with the parents, whereas only eight (13%) felt their visit had minimal or no positive effects. Two teachers reported that the home visit resulted in negative changes in their relationship with parents. The most obvious occurred when the teacher discovered that the child was attending the wrong school because of zoning guidelines. When this discovery led to a required change in schools, the parents reported to the teacher that they felt this would not have happened if the home visit had not taken place.

Improved relationships with students. Figure 2 presents the results of the teachers' perceptions about the effects of the home visit on their relationships with students. Fifty-three teachers (88%) reported that

Figure 1
Teachers' Perceptions of Home Visits on Relationships with Parents

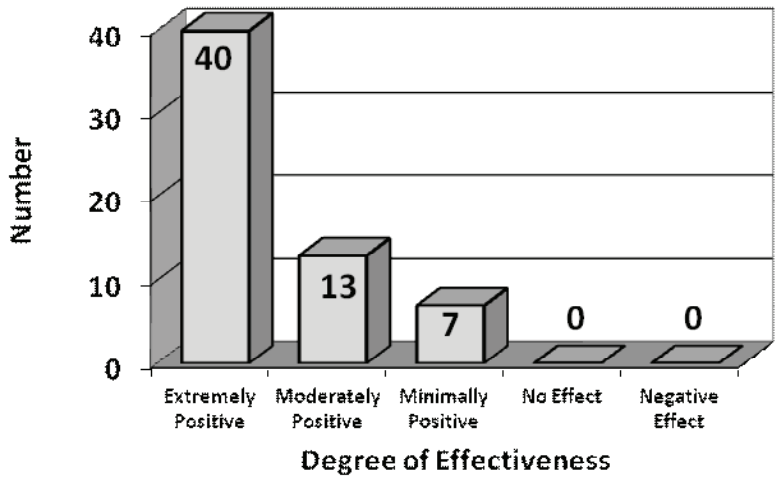


the home visit had an extremely positive to moderately positive effect on their relationship with their students, and only seven (12%) felt the experience had minimal or no positive effect. No one felt that the home visit experience resulted in a negative change in their relationship with students, even the teacher whose student was required to transfer schools. Teachers provided great insights about how their home visit changed their thinking, attitudes, and future commitments. Below are a few examples that represent dozens of teacher statements about the home visit project:

> When first asked if we would conduct a home visit, I was a little leery. I work in a low SES area and, though it is common for me to work late up at school without concern, it is different when you are deep in the neighborhoods at that time of night. I considered asking my husband or a colleague to accompany me, but decided that it would be fine, less intimidating, and I would accomplish more if I went alone. I felt like a celebrity driving down the streets because all of the kids that were outside were waving in disbelief and excitement when they saw me driving through their neighborhood. Several of my own students ran up and hugged me when I got out of the car. It was far from what I had pictured in my mind. (B. Williams, personal communication, April 19, 2009)

> Home visits can be a very intimidating experience but it is worth it when teachers are out of answers at school. By visiting their home, teachers

Figure 2
Teachers' Perceptions of Home Visits on Relationships with Students



> can see what difficulties if any the family is going through. Teachers can also see how students act outside the school environment. I believe Tony's improvement would not have happened if I hadn't visited the family and gained his parents' confidence and cooperation. (M. Vazquez, personal communication, April 19, 2009)
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> This case study opened my eyes. I was extremely intimidated when I was asked to conduct a home visit. I am extremely uncomfortable going into stranger's homes, especially a student's home, and felt this could compromise the relationship I have at school. This experience taught me that it's okay to have personal relationships with my students and their families. (A. McMillan, personal communication, April 19, 2009)
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> I was a little hesitant to conduct a home visit because I had never done one before. Once I was finished, I thought to myself, "Wow, what a neat experience." The family was able to see me from another perspective. I was wearing jeans, a shirt, and flip-flops (not at all in compliance with "professional" dress, but nice). I believe this made them feel more relaxed which caused them to open up more. I learned more in two hours than I could have the whole year." (K. Gordon, personal communication, April 19, 2009)
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> When I was first asked to visit Katie's home I was extremely nervous. I felt like I was way out of my element. I didn't want to intimidate Katie or her parents by asking if I could stop by. Once I was there we had a nice visit. I believe that Katie and her family began to see me as a real person and not just as a teacher. I will have to admit, I feel like Katie's family and I became closer after the visit, making it easier for us to communicate throughout the semester. This experience has shown me how important it is to have a strong relationship with my students and their parents. When we form relationships, we are able to work together to help each child be successful. (K. Freeman, personal communication, April 19, 2009)

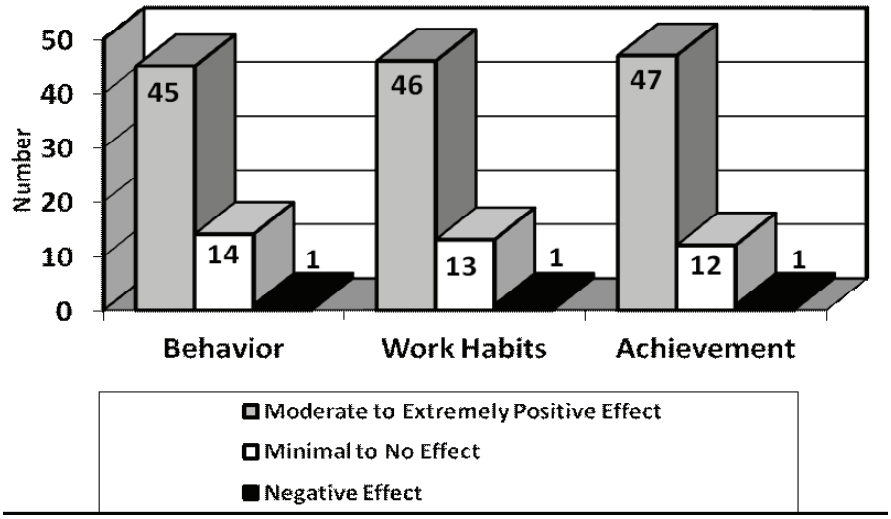
Behavior, work habits, and achievement. Figure 3 represents results of the survey for student behavior, work habits, and academic achievement. Forty-five of the teachers in this study (75%) reported an extremely positive to moderately positive improvement in the student's classroom behavior. In addition, the majority of teachers also reported an extremely positive to moderately positive change in student work habits (N=46, 76%), and academic achievement (N=47, 78%). They attributed these improvements directly to the goal setting, communication, and cooperation established during the home visit. A few teachers reported minimally positive or no improvement in all three areas. Only one teacher of the 60 reported a negative result on all three variables. In that situation, during the home visit it was discovered that the child was attending the wrong school and, because of zoning regulations, the child was required

to transfer to a different campus. This event was upsetting to the family and to the teacher, who felt she probably contributed to the situation because of her home visit. Even though this problem was unfortunate, it did not negatively impact the excited and hopeful attitudes of the rest of the teachers. Below are a few examples of the dozens of anecdotal stories from teachers involved in this study:

> Bill was the most stubborn, mule-headed, independent, freethinking (and these are just the things I'm allowed to say) child I had ever encountered. He had 10 office referrals by Christmas and had physically attacked me when he was asked to line up with the rest of the class. We were most definitely not seeing eye to eye! It was so hard to be patient with someone who was so stubborn. We were in a tug-of-war. I think I had an epiphany the day I found out he was bragging about the nice note I wrote to him. Almost as if by magic, something clicked. He was different. He didn't have to be like everyone else. This obstinate boy who tried my patience and challenged my beliefs has won a place in my heart. I will never forget this child or this experience. Bill might have changed the way I approach teaching as much as I have changed him this year. (S. Thompson, personal communication, April 19, 2009)

> Since my home visit my relationship with Jenny has grown and I can see an improvement in her willingness to work. Developing individual goals for Jenny has helped increase positive behavior and helped her

Figure 3
Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of Their Home Visit on Their Students' Behavior, Work Habits, and Academic Achievement



> become more successful academically. (K. Anderson, personal communication, April 19, 2009)
>
> Joy is much changed in behavior and academics at home and school. She is more willing to make an effort to understand what is being taught. She is getting along with other students much better, is getting better grades, and reaching the goals we set when we visited with the family. She is very cooperative and communicative with her parents and me. I think she is now looking at us as her friends who support her. My greatest sense of achievement is when she smiles at me and tells me that she wants to be a teacher like me. (L. Medina, personal communication, April 19, 2009)
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> After my home visit, Coral started showing a lot of changes for the positive both in academics and behavior. I wasn't sure that I would ever get her to turn in her work, listen, or participate appropriately in the classroom. More recently she has found the ability to focus for longer periods of time, her grades have come up, and her relationship with her peers has become quite different. The change in Coral's belief in herself has done a lot to create a difference in how the student's view her. She now believes she is capable of achieving things that she felt were impossible before. (B. Williams, personal communication, April 19, 2009)

Discussion

The teachers in this study were apprehensive about participating in a home visit and approached it with hesitation, intimidation and, in a few cases, fear for their safety. Parents, too, were often hesitant for a variety of different reasons. While the teachers initially expressed uncertainty and concern, the outcome was overwhelmingly positive.

One second grade bilingual teacher stated that the visit was very intimidating for her but well worth the effort. Her student would not have changed in the ways he did had she not visited his parents in their home and had not developed a strong parent-teacher relationship. A first grade teacher admitted that she learned more during the two hour home visit than she could have the entire year of working just with the child in the classroom.

Parents who experienced the home visit became stalwart allies of the school and their teachers. A third grade teacher reported that her student's parents said they were "so grateful for her willingness to go that extra mile for their son." On several occasions when the father picked up his child after school, he thanked her over and over again for helping save his son.

In addition to the qualitative data submitted by the teachers in their written reports, teachers participated in small discussion groups during

their university class with 4-to-6 teachers in each group. The groups were asked to talk about three topics; (1) significant insights about the home visit, (2) impact on teacher-student relationships, and (3) most challenging part of the visit. The data were then collected, reviewed, and sorted by commonality. Some of the more significant highlights of these data are reported below.

Teacher Deliberation over Home Visit

As concerned as these teachers were to initiate a home visit, their willingness to make that visit brought them results far beyond their expectations. Most agreed that the home visit itself was the most significant outcome and that the relationships with parents improved most drastically. Even teachers with mediocre results felt it was one of the most important events for the parents, teacher, and student. One unexpected reason cited by the teachers about the significance of the visit was the deep sense of empathy they developed toward the family, a feeling that would never have occurred without the home visit. In the great majority of cases, teachers saw first-hand the impact of life issues facing many of their families, poor living conditions, single parents, grandparents taking over the parenting role, inadequate and/or unhealthy nutrition, poor parental management skills, and parents totally incapable of helping with school and homework. Teachers began to see their students in this new light and it not only changed the attitude toward the parents, but intensified the teacher's desire to see the student succeed.

Identifying goals common to both parents and teacher became a powerful tool to increase and maintain communication between the teacher and the family. Not only were parents more motivated to initiate contact with the teacher, but they no longer felt the intimidation that kept them away. Conversations were much more light-hearted and personal, both parties were less defensive, and parents felt that the teacher's interest in their child was genuine. Teachers saw parents as being much more supportive, more open, and more realistic about the problems. The home visit put into perspective what the students' "world" was really like and how his/her home life directly affected the child's behavior at school.

Teacher-Student Relationships

A major revelation for many was the realization that the rich insight into the lives and challenges of their students would not have been nearly as substantial except for the home visit. The ability to be inside the child's home, compile data, build background knowledge about the family, and discuss goals both parties could work on caused the teachers to realize how much more hopeful they were for positive changes in at-

titudes and behaviors. Mentioned most often by teachers was the positive effects the home visit had on the relationship with their students. Not that the relationship was necessarily negative before, but it should be remembered that these students were in trouble with behavior and/or academic problems and that often yields strained relationships in the classroom. Teachers mentioned over and over again about the improved relationships, the increased number of positive contacts, and the sense of bonding that took place with the students.

A second positive outcome was the accomplishment of goals that were established during the home visit. As previously stated, one objective of the home visit was to identify one to three specific areas that needed attention and generate solutions that both parties could work toward. Most often those goals consisted of focused and measurable behaviors such as attendance, missing or late assignments, conflicts with peers and siblings, and other specific misbehaviors at school. Few of the teachers in this study had used goal setting in any formal way, and certainly not with parents. In this case the goal sheet was very basic: (1) the goal, (2) parents will …, (3) the teacher will …, and (4) the student will …. They also agreed to exchange phone numbers, cell phone numbers, email addresses, or whatever method was most comfortable for everyone involved. Seeing the goals written down and watching how the students worked to achieve them was very satisfying for the teachers.

One of the surprising outcomes for teachers was a switch in the students' apparent desire for teacher approval. Many of these children rationalized that they didn't really care about their failures, nor did they care about their teacher's approval. This is a "sour grapes" defensive mechanism that says, "I can't get the approval of my teachers anyway so I just won't care." Strengthening the bond between the teacher and student seemed to change student motivation. Students did overt things to check out their teachers' attitudes toward them. Sometimes they would bring gifts from home, volunteer for duties when they never did before, and make special trips to the teacher's desk to show their work.

Most Challenging Aspects of the Home Visit

The biggest challenge for the majority of teachers was a fear of the unknown; an unfriendly neighborhood, being out of their element, or possibly putting themselves in an unsafe situation. All teachers in the study completed one home visit, and most seemed to work through their initial anxiety. Some elected to take a colleague, and most who had an English Language Learner (ELL) child took a Spanish-speaking colleague. Whether real or imagined, their anxieties were a factor that no one was going to deny or ignore. Once the visit was completed, relation-

ships strengthened, and students began to improve in their behavior and school work, the attitudes of the teachers took a dramatic turn. Not only were they thankful for the opportunity, most of them decided they would make this a practice each year.

A minor challenge for several teachers was scheduling issues. Parents would agree to a date and time and then want to reschedule, several times in some cases. Some parents tried to cancel or meet at the school and the teachers had to work hard to persuade parents of the importance of visiting and meeting in the home. A few teachers worried that their visit might intimidate parents, or they felt they might be intruding too much. Two teachers stated that they were concerned that parents might feel embarrassed or ashamed about the conditions of the home or neighborhood. One teacher even said she feared the home visit might compromise the relationship she had already developed with the family. These fears did not prove to be reality.

The final challenge was one related to instruction. Establishing goals with parents and brainstorming strategies that both parties would work toward accomplishing was not so difficult for teachers, but somewhat foreign to many parents, especially given that they were to collaborate in establishing goals that were (1) very specific, (2) achievable in short periods of time, e. g., 3-to-4 weeks, (3) objective, and (4) measurable. Parents needed guidance and answers from the teachers and consistent information and advice about what they should be doing to help their child achieve the goals that had been established during the home visit. An important lesson these educators learned is that educating parents about ways they can assist their children must be focused and specific to each child's needs, rather than depending on generalized "announcement" type advice for all families.

Identifying possibilities for improving relationships with parents can only result in improved possibilities for students. One 3rd grade teacher summed up the home visit experience by saying,

> This is my ninth year of teaching and sometimes, after you have been teaching a while, you forget the simple things that you need to do because you get so wrapped up in scores, testing, and student performance. I feel that I had forgotten how important it is to teach the child, not just the information. In this experience, I have again renewed my love for the children, not just for teaching. I feel that not just Coral, but all my students are better for it. (B. Williams, personal communication, April 19, 2009)

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