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Home/School/Community Collaboration: Connections for Kids

Susan M. Sheridan
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ssheridan2@unl.edu

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Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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"I am interested in attempts to develop the notion of a community system of services, mutually interdependent, seeking to locate, evaluate and serve the interests of families and children in trouble. The concepts of accountability and responsibility provide the motive power for some sacrifice of traditional prerogatives in the face of community objectives."

--Eleanor Roosevelt

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"Community"

- Derived from Latin "communis" – "common"
- Shared cultures, identities, responsibilities and values are essential.
- Beyond geographic familiarity, community connotes a place of reference and belonging.

"It takes a village…"

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"The top three ingredients for effective collaboration… would be relationship, relationship, relationship."

--McDaniel, Campbell, and Seaburn (1995)

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The Importance of Connections for Kids

- Connections/Relationships are key for children's secure learning and development
- The importance of relationships begin within the home system and quickly extend to relationships outside of the home in the preschool and school systems, and to relationships between these primary systems.

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Relationships & Engagement

- When thinking about home-school-community collaboration from a relationship perspective, it makes sense to define optimal roles in terms of *engagement* rather than simply involvement or participation.
- There is a clear and unequivocal correlation between parent engagement and a child's development.
- There is also a clear and unequivocal correlation between teacher-child relationships and academic and social-emotional functioning.

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Relationships & Engagement

What do we mean by
"engagement?"

Webster: *To interlock with; to bind; to pledge oneself*

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Parent Engagement

- Defined as "attention, interest, and commitment to a child and his/her development within and across multiple social and learning contexts."
- Parent-child attachment & connectedness is clearly related to a child's healthy development.
  - In young children, attachment is related to social, affective, and early school learning
  - Adolescents have a higher probability of avoiding high risk behavior when they feel connected to their families and their parents are involved in their lives
- By definition, parent engagement is a relational construct.

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Indicators of Parent Engagement

- Warmth, Sensitivity, Responsiveness to Child
- Support for the Child's Autonomy
- Active Participation in the Child's Learning and Literacy

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Beyond Parent Engagement:
The Importance of Continuity

- Students move from one context to another
  – Interrelationships between students' worlds, and how meanings and understandings combine, affect their commitment to and outcomes related to learning
- The degree of match between home and school contexts is a contributing factor for students' success
- "Risk" may be considered a product of "borders" between systems that prohibit youth from connecting optimally with school (Phelan et al., 1992)
  – Children who experience borders (discontinuities) among home, school and peer/community worlds have the most difficulty making transitions across contexts and are at greatest risk for poor school performance and mental health concerns.

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The Importance of Continuity

- Connections between sometimes disparate systems within which children and youth must navigate are important.
- Continuity across contexts (systems continuity) and over time (temporal continuity) are both critically important for positive learning outcomes.
- Interventions that create and sustain positive relationships/continuities for children *within* and *across* home and school contexts, and *over temporal conditions*, provide important **prerequisite conditions** for improving outcomes.

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The Importance of Continuity

- *Bridges* (rather than borders or barriers) can increase students' chances of successfully navigating sometimes divergent settings.
- It is essential that we focus on **building bridges** for students by strengthening relationships and partnerships across systems (home-school-community) and promoting continuity in expectations, goals, and support for learning.

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From an "Engaged Parent" to an "Engaged Partnership"

- As an extension of "parent engagement," an engaged partnership is one where there is attention, interest, and *commitment to the home-school partnership* on behalf of the child's learning and development
- There is a **pledge** for working together, sharing responsibilities and resources for childrens' learning

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Indicators of Engaged Partnerships

Parent Engagement

- Warmth, Sensitivity, Responsiveness →

- Support for Autonomy →

- Active Participation in Learning and Literacy →

Engaged Partnership

- Positive Communication and Perspective-taking

- Appreciation for Unique Roles *and* Interdependencies

- Co-construction and Continuity Across Systems

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What Does an Engaged Partnership Look Like?

In engaged partnerships, there are:

- Mutual interests and commitments to working together on behalf of the child's performance/achievement
- Interdependencies related to the child's learning
- Frequent, positive, bidirectional communication
- Clear and mutual roles
- Shared goals
- Co-constructed plans

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Defining Characteristics of Engaged Partnerships

Interactions among partners are <u>collaborative</u>:

- More than simply working together, there is a fundamental restructuring of *how* individuals and agencies work together.
- Individuals work together as co-equal parties.
- Personal needs are put aside to allow the needs and goals of the group to take precedence.
- All parties believe that the partnership and the anticipated outcomes are worthy of the expenditure of time and energy necessary for its maintenance.
- Resources, power, and responsibilities are shared.

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Defining Characteristics of Engaged Partnerships

Relationships are <u>cooperative</u>, <u>interdependent</u>, and <u>based on trust</u>:

– Roles are complementary -- Each party makes a unique contribution that is mutually beneficial.

– Outcomes achieved in the context of the partnership are uniquely superior to those achieved by any one party in isolation.

– To be successful, partners must believe that the other person is trustworthy, is working toward a mutually held goal, and holds positive regard toward each other.

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Defining Characteristics of Engaged Partnerships

<u>Differences in perspectives</u> are seen as strengths:

– A range of diverse experiences, skills, and views are brought to bear on the solution of problems.

– Unique knowledge, resources, talents, and expertise brought by parents, educators, and community agents enhance the potential outcomes for students.

There is a commitment to <u>cultural competence</u>:

– Cultural values and traditions of family, school, and community members are respected.

– Services that are sensitive to important cultures and traditions in the community are most likely to be effective.

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Defining Characteristics of Engaged Partnerships

Emphasis is on <u>shared goals</u>, <u>outcomes</u>, <u>and goal attainment</u>:

- Partnerships have clearly specified goals, and progress is monitored through data-based decision making processes.
- Goals are mutually determined.
- Main attention is always on the potential benefits and outcomes for students.
- All have generally equal and shared opportunities in establishing plans and making decisions.
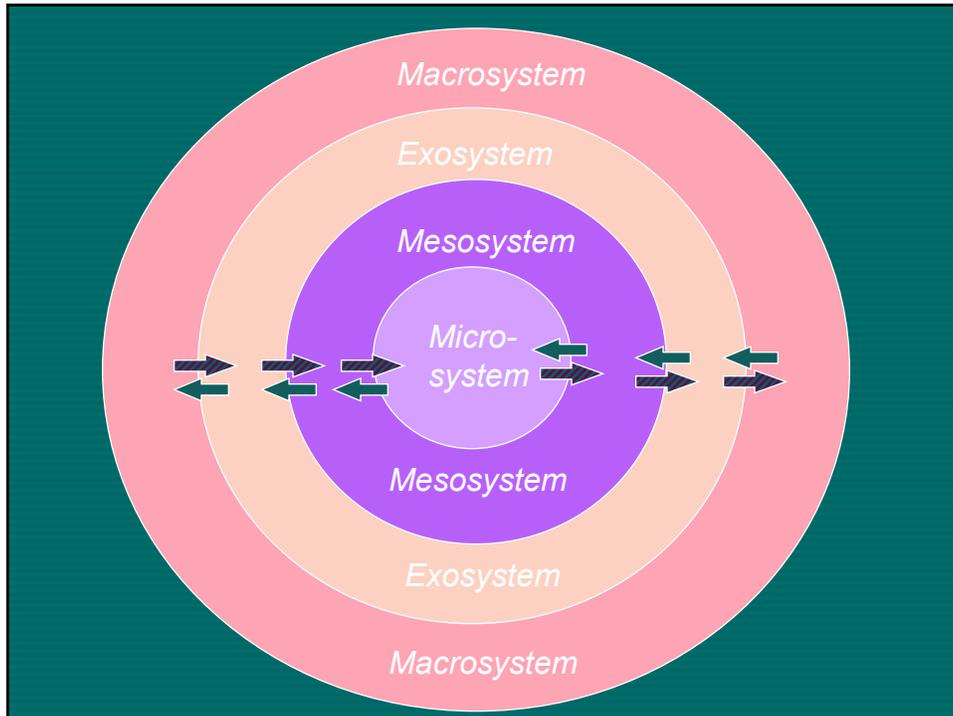
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Role of the School Psychologist

Recognize, promote, and reinforce primary goals:

- Facilitate systemic collaboration
  - Empower the mesosystem

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Role of the School Psychologist: The "4 A's"

- Evaluate your **Approach**

- Model a constructive **Attitude**

- Establish a positive **Atmosphere**

- Put into place engaged **Actions**

-- Christenson & Sheridan, 2001

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Actions

- Garner **Administrative Support**
  - Working with administrators is key
  - Establish policies for partnerships
  - Include policies for:
    - Participation of parents who lack literacy skills or do not speak English
    - Regular information for parents about their child's progress
    - Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents
    - Opportunities for parents to assist in the instructional process at school and home
    - Recognition and appreciation for diverse family structures, circumstances, and responsibilities, and how they may impact roles

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Actions

- Practice **Systems Advocacy**
  - Commit to the "long haul"
  - Promote programs based on principles, rather than procedures
  - Focus on process-related actions versus targeted activities
  - Build a knowledge base and skills in the school and community to support changes
  - Promote, do not "sell," changes
  - Be strategic in actions; "work smarter, not harder"
  - Six words: Think big, start small, go slow

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Actions

- Build **Family-School Teams**
  - Promote schoolwide efforts
- Increase **Effective Problem Solving** and **Solution Finding**
  - Relevant for individualized needs and concerns, such as conjoint behavioral consultation (Sheridan et al., 1996)
- Focus on **Communication**

➤ See Appendices A and B

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Actions

- Keep a **Focus on Goals and Outcomes**
  - Promote child learning and development across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains
  - Obtain comprehensive and functional data across settings
  - Establish consistent treatment programs
  - Improve skills of all parties
  - Monitor behavioral contrast effects
  - Enhance generalization and maintenance
  - Promote shared problem solving in future situations

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Actions

- But Recognize the **Importance of Process**:
    - Increase understandings
    - Establish partnerships
    - Promote shared ownership
    - Promote greater conceptualizations
    - Strengthen relationships
    - Recognize cross-setting needs and opportunities
    - Increase shared commitments
    - Increase diversity of expertise and resources
        - See Appendix C

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Actions

- **Foster Positive Home Learning Environments**
  - Develop strategies to support families in "RP3M"
    - **Respond** to child in an appropriate manner, **Prevent** risky behavior or problems before they occur, **Monitor** child's contact with his/her surroundings; **Mentor** child to support and encourage desired behaviors, **Model** behaviors to provide a consistent, positive example (Borkowski, Ramey, & Stile, 2002)
  - Facilitate family members' efforts to establish a "curriculum of the home"
    - Standards and Expectations, Structure, Opportunity to Learn, Support for Learning, Climate/Relationships, Modeling
  - Develop constructive approaches for teachers and family members to interact around homework, and share in the responsibility for meaningful homework activities and interactions

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For more information or correspondence, please feel free to contact me!!

Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
239 Teachers College Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345
ssheridan2@unl.edu

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