



Parent-Teacher Connections in Early Childhood: Learning From a Successful Pilot Program to Ease the Transition to Kindergarten

Crista Marchesseault, MAT, MA
Gesell Institute of Human Development

Tina Mannarino, PhD
New Haven Public Schools

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Parent-Teacher Connection Program (P-TCP)

A collaboration between Gesell Institute
(a New Haven-based non-profit) and
the New Haven Public Schools:

- Fostering the adaptation of 4-year-olds in preschool/Head Start settings
- Promoting communication between home and school
- Supporting the transition to Kindergarten
- Improving school success



Home-School Connection Program (H-SCP)



- The model on which the New Haven P-TCP is based
- A collaborative effort between Tufts University and the Somerville Public Schools in Massachusetts
- Directed by Dr. Martha Garcia-Sellers at Tufts from 1994-2006





General Program Goals

- Improving the school adaptation of immigrant elementary school children
- Promoting home-school communication
- Involving parents, children, and teachers
- Discovering & accentuating commonalities
- Improving school success



Responding to Community Needs

Somerville, MA in 1994:

- Increased numbers of immigrant children in public schools
- Changes in the educational options for bilingual education
- Unfamiliarity on the part of teachers with non-English speaking students
- Differing expectations about children's schooling on the part of parents and teachers





Reported Problems

- Low academic performance
- Adaptation concerns
- Teacher frustration with slow progress
- School desire for more family support
- Parental concerns about children's academic success
- Uncertainty about how parents could support school effort



Understanding the Challenges

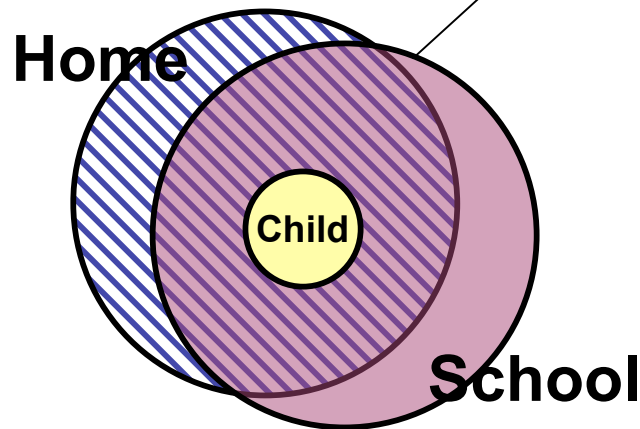
- Little or no communication between parents and teachers
- Promotion of different behavior and varying expectations
- Different values or the same values but with different meanings
- Different perceptions of the child
- Unfamiliarity with school requirements





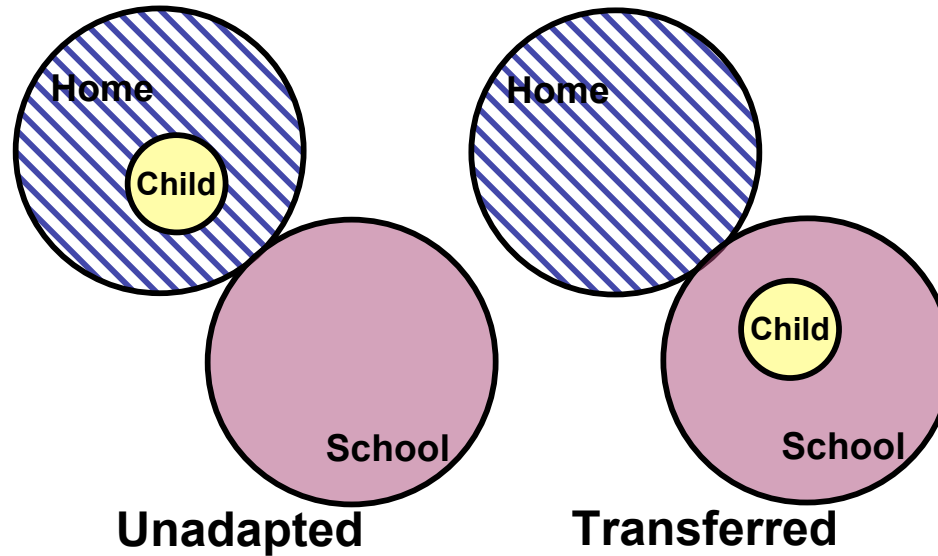
Conceptual Model

(Garcia-Sellers, 1999)



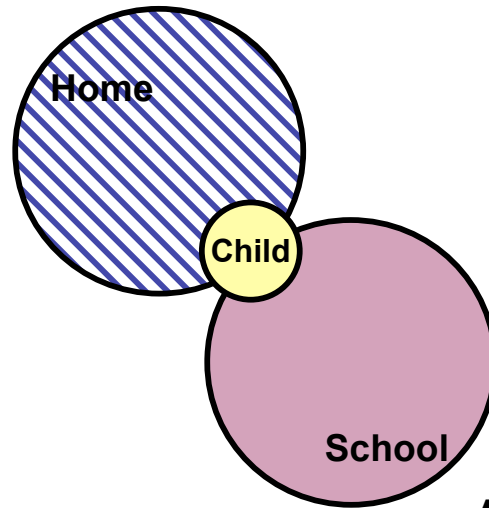
In the modal U.S. family, there is a large overlap between home and school culture that facilitates the child's adaptation to school.

For immigrant families there is little or no overlap, thus requiring significant adjustment by the child in order to adapt.



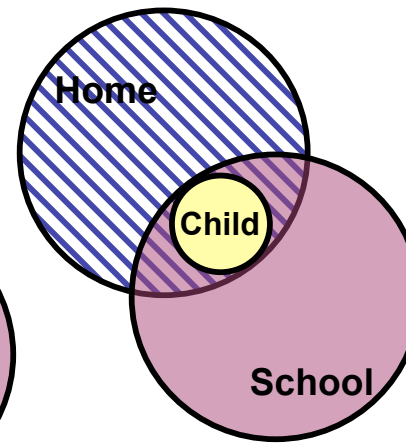
Child's home and school environment are separate; the child remains within the family's influence and has difficulties adapting to school.

Child eventually makes the transition to the school environment, but loses or rejects much of his or her parents' cultural heritage in the process.



Adapted

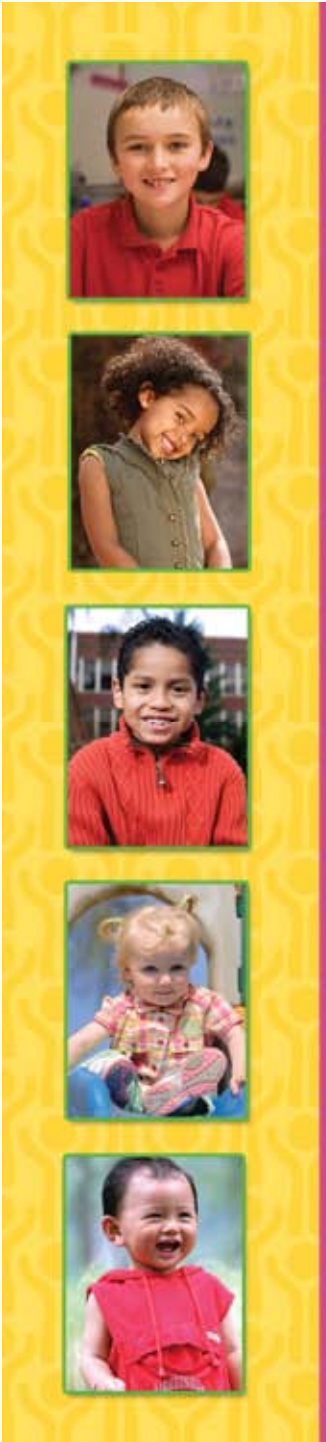
The child learns to manage and reconcile the subcultures of both his or her home and school environments.



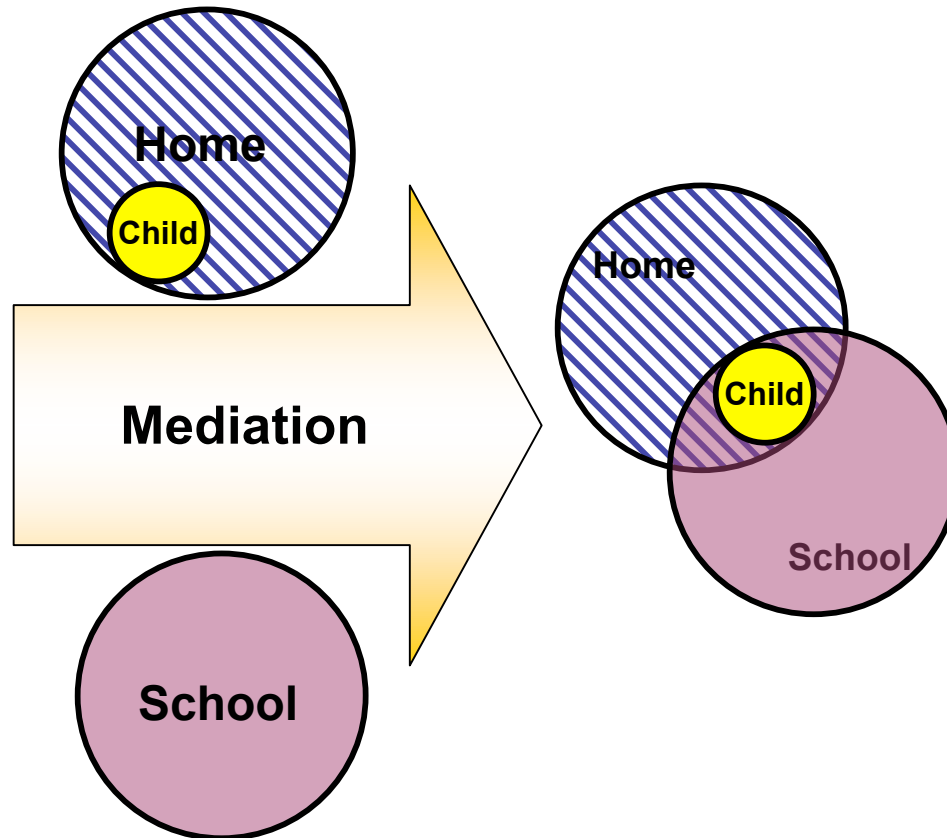
Adapted with Support

Communication between the home and school provides continuity between the two subcultures facilitating the child's school transition.





Program Impact



New Haven Public Schools

- Increased numbers of immigrant children and families
- Racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse population
- Growing concerns about parent involvement and understanding of school expectations
- Increased awareness and focus on Kindergarten transition





P-TCP Pilot Recruitment

Of 57 families attempted in Spring '08:

- 10 were enrolled
- 6 scheduled but cancelled
- 2 asked to be called in the summer
- 6 refused
- 33 resulted in no response or were unable to be reached





Pilot Recruitment

Of 148 attempted Summer '08:

- 38 were enrolled
- 8 scheduled but cancelled
- 10 refused
- 92 resulted in no response or were unable to be reached





Pilot Recruitment

Of 183 attempted Fall '08:

- 43 were engaged (enrolled/continued)
- 12 scheduled but cancelled
- 10 refused
- 118 resulted in no response or were unable to be reached





Response Rates

- Spring 2008 kick-off:
 - 10 engaged families of 57 attempted recruits
 - 17.5% response rate
- 2008-2009 academic year:
 - 43 engaged of 183 attempted recruits
 - 23.5% response rate
- 18-month pilot (Spring 2008-Winter 2009):
 - 59 total engaged of 288 total attempted
 - 15.2% overall response rate.





2008-2009 Attrition

- Of 43 families engaged during the full year:
 - 13 were lost to attrition (30%)
 - 9 transferred to another school or program (21%)
 - 4 could not be located for follow-up (9%)
- 30 families remained engaged through follow-up





Parent Participants

- Interviewee relationship to child:
 - 87% mother
 - 6% father
 - 6% grandparent
 - 1% foster parent
- Marital status:
 - 55% single parent
 - 38% married or living with other parent
 - 7% living w/ significant other/non-parent





Native Language

- Parent's native language
 - 73% Spanish
 - 25% English
 - 2% French
- Language spoken in the home
 - 81% speak non-English native language
 - 19% speak only English





Level of Education

- Interviewee's highest level of education
 - 10% grade school
 - 44% high school
 - 18% some college
 - 22% college degree (Associate's/Bachelor's)
- Other parental figure highest level of education
 - 18% grade school
 - 61% high school
 - 11% some college
 - 10% other



Program Type and Previous Experience

- 67% enrolled in bilingual setting
- 14% receive Special Education services
- 74% had no previous preschool or daycare experience
- 12% were enrolled in daycare previously
- 8% another preschool program
- 6% Early Head Start





P-TCP General Protocol

- At school: interview teachers to obtain their understanding
- At home: Interview parents to learn about their expectations
- At home and school: Observe children's behavior





General Procedures

- Initial classroom visits: conduct general observations using the Preschool Mental Health Climate Scale (PMHCS, Gilliam)
- Home visits: obtain consent and conduct parent/family interviews & child activities
- Child specific classroom visits: conduct observation, child interview, and screening using the K-SEALS
- Teacher meetings: provide feedback and collect child-specific forms
- Feedback and mediation meetings with parents and teachers as needed





2008-2009 Data

- Number of adults in the household
 - 19% reported only one adult in household
 - 42% reported two adults
 - 25% reported three adults
 - 14% reported four or more adults
- Number of children in the household
 - 40% have only one child
 - 34% have two children
 - 16% have three children
 - 10% have four or more children



Communication and Participation

- 98% reported almost always being comfortable approaching their child's teacher when needed, but only 50% reported a desire to communicate with the teacher
- 70% reported going to the classroom daily, but only 24% expressed a desire to do so, the majority preferring a weekly visit or less
- 32% expressed an interest in attending open houses or other school-sponsored events
- 22% expressed either being unsure how to participate or being insecure about becoming involved with the classroom





Expectations

- 80% reported that it is important to help get their child ready for Kindergarten, while only 4% expressed enjoying it
- 81% expect that their children will learn the alphabet in preschool
- 83% expect that their children will learn how to spell their name
- 87% expect that they will be taught to count
- 85% expect that they will be taught numbers
- 73% expect that they will be taught to write





Participating Classrooms

- General observations were conducted in 17 classrooms
- 65% were scored with positive indicators observed often
 - 94% positive on Space & Materials
 - 67% positive on Transitions
 - 59% positive on Directions & Rules
 - 70% positive on Staff-Child Interactions
 - 70% positive on Pedagogy
- 29% were scored with negative indicators sometimes observed





Teacher Interviews

Teachers reported the following about participating children:

- 100% enjoy school
- 94% have adjusted well to class
- 97% communicate in English with the teacher
- 62% communicate in Spanish with the teacher
- 91% speak English during class activities
- 62% speak Spanish during class activities





Teacher Interviews

Only 29% reported knowing anything about the child's previous school or child Care experience. Of these teachers:

- 23% were told by parents
- 16% spoke with prior teacher/provider
- 33% knew the child before
- 10% reviewed the child's file





Parent-Teacher Interactions

- 3% had never met
- 76% met via teacher's approach
- 21% met via parent's approach

- 74% met on the first day of school
- 26% met on orientation or transition day

- 16% have met only once
- 28% have met 2-4 times
- 13% have met 5-7 times
- 31% have met more than 8 times





Teacher Interviews

When asked what the parent or guardian could do more of to support the child:

- 15% said nothing more
- 65% said academics at home
- 18% said social skills at home
- 24% said set limits at home
- 32% said work on daily routine
- 30% said talk more with child
- 9% said talk more with teacher





Child Observations

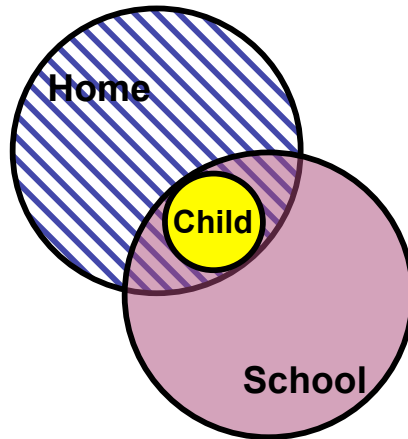
Individual child observations indicated:

- 17% bothered others/created a disturbance
- 18% were bothered by other children
- 55% sought teacher's attention
- 64% were addressed by teacher with praise
- 41% were corrected by teacher re: behavior
- 21% received negative feedback from teachers
- 93% seemed happy at school
- 8% seemed tired at school
- 18% seemed anxious at school
- 93% transitioned well between activities





Program Objectives



Adapted with Support

- Improve communication
- Support children's adaptation to school
- Promote common understanding and expectations
- Support the transition to Kindergarten
- Promote school success



Connecting Through Common Values



- Recognizing differences and finding common purpose
- Acknowledging that there is no “one way” to understand differences
- Focusing on common goals and transcending differences between parents and teachers
- Nurturing and understanding the child’s development
- Supporting the transition to Kindergarten and overall school success





Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased parent involvement
- Improved student attendance
- Collaboration and agreement on decisions surround child issues
- Empowered parents who can better advocate for their children
- Supported teachers who are better able to generate strategies to communicate effectively with parents





Challenges

- Timeline
- Funding cuts
- Delayed funding continuation
- Access to Kindergarten classrooms
- Classroom schedules/communication
- Documentation
- Consistent data
- Staffing



Successes



- Community relationships
- NHPS collaboration
- Supervision and training
- Parent involvement and feedback
- Teacher/classroom welcome
- Service to families and classrooms
- Strengthened model and protocol





On-going Efforts

- Year three will soon be underway
- We are recruiting from two early childhood locations and 13 classrooms
- We are refining our measures and our protocol based on the pilot
- We are working on grant-writing efforts to strengthen the model and add a stronger evaluative component
- We are working with the city's Kindergarten Transition Committee to strengthen the connection with K-12





Citations

- Brizuela, B. and Garcia-Sellers, M.J., 1999. *School Adaptation: A Triangular Process*, American Educational Research Journal.
- Garcia-Sellers, M.J., 1995. *La Adaptacion Escolar*. Revista do Psicopedagogia, Abordajes, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Ano 1, No. 1.





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- Program advisor Martha Garcia-Sellers, PhD, who created the model on which the P-TCP is based for the Home-School Connection Program in Massachusetts





Contact Information

Parent-Teacher Connection Program

A Collaboration Between the Gesell Institute and New Haven Public Schools



310 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT 06511

www.gesellinstitute.org

Parent-Teacher Liaison

Phone: 203-777-3481

Toll Free: 1-800-369-7709

Fax: 203-776-5001

E-mail: ptcp@gesellinstitute.org

Promoting communication between parents and teachers.

