



Fostering parent-teacher communication and supporting the transition to Kindergarten: How one program can make all the difference

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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



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**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



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### 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



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### 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



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### 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



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## 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




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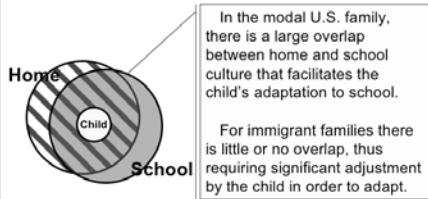
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## Conceptual Model (Garcia-Sellers, 1999)




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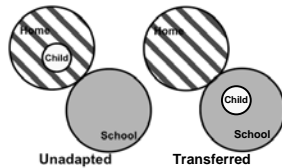
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**Unadapted**

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

**Transferred**

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




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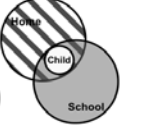
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**Adapted**

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.




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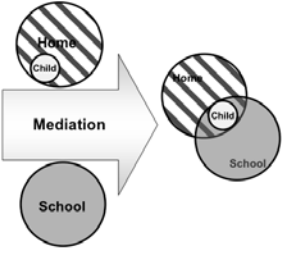
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### Program Impact






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### 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




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### 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




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### Pilot Recruitment

Of 95 attempted in Summer '08:

- 30 were enrolled
- 5 scheduled but cancelled
- 6 refused
- 49 resulted in no response or were unable to be reached




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### Pilot Participants

- Interviewee relationship to child:
  - 85% mother
  - 7.5% father
  - 5% grandparent
- Marital status:
  - 50% single parent
  - 42.5% married or living with other parent
  - 7.5% living w/ significant other/non-parent




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### Native Language

- Parent's native language
  - 70% Spanish
  - 22.5% English
  - 2.5% French
- Language spoken in the home
  - 72.5% speak non-English native language
  - 27.5% speak only English




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### Program Type and Previous Experience

- 62.5% enrolled in bilingual setting
- 17.5% receive Special Education services
- 67.5% had no previous preschool or daycare experience
- 15% were enrolled in daycare previously
- 7.5% another preschool program
- 5% Early Head Start




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### 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




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### 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




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### 2008 Pilot Data

- Number of adults in the household
  - 17.5% reported only one adult in household
  - 35% reported two adults
  - 27% reported three adults
  - 15% reported four or more adults
- Number of children in the household
  - 37.5% have only one child
  - 27.5% have two children
  - 15% have three children
  - 10% have four or more children




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### Communication and Participation

- 95% reported almost always being comfortable approaching their child's teacher when needed, but only 40% reported a desire to communicate with the teacher
- 57.5% reported going to the classroom daily, but but only 17.5% expressed a desire to do so, the majority preferring a weekly visit or less
- 22.5% expressed an interest in attending open houses or other school-sponsored events
- 20% expressed either being unsure how to participate or being insecure about becoming involved with the classroom




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## Expectations

- 65% reported that it is important to help get their child ready for Kindergarten, while only 5% expressed enjoying it
- 67.5% expect that their children will learn the alphabet in preschool
- 75% expect that their children will learn how to spell their name
- 72.5% expect that they will be taught to count
- 60% expect that they will be taught numbers
- 60% expect that they will be taught to write




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## Incoming Data

- Teacher ratings
- Child academic skills
- Attendance data
- Parent and teacher views
- Parental involvement
- Changes in behaviors and expectations for a sub-sample of children from the pilot who remain engaged in the program and at the participating preschool sites




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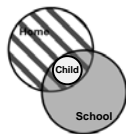
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## Program Objectives



Adapted with Support

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




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### **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



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### **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



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### **On-going Efforts**

- Year two is now underway
- We are recruiting from four early childhood locations and 200 families
- We are refining our measures and our protocol
- Pilot data is being entered for initial analysis
- Parent events and seminars are being planned for Winter and Spring '09



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### 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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### Acknowledgments

- The Parent-Teacher Connection Program would not be possible without...
- A Head Start LINK grant from the Connecticut Department of Education
  - The children, parents, and staff at Wexler-Grant & Hill-Central Elementary Schools, and at LULAC Head Start, in New Haven
  - Program liaisons Rebecca Boulos, Maria Fonseca, Stefanie Foster, Gwendolyn Gilchrist, & Elizabeth Santy
  - 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




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### Contact Information

**Parent-Teacher Connection Program**  
 A Collaboration Between the Gesell Institute and New Haven Public Schools

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*Promoting communication between parents and teachers.*




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