Evaluation of a School, Family, and Community Partnerships Program for Preservice Teachers in Quebec, Canada

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ABSTRACT: Research reveals that schools and teachers must take the leadership in planning and implementing parent and community involvement practices. Some authors have shown that preservice course experiences contribute to enhance participants' perceptions of their competence levels in fostering family and community involvement. The current evaluative research is aimed at investigating the impact of a Quebec school, family and community partnerships program on preservice teachers' knowledge and comfort levels in working with families and the community, and on their personal attitudes and beliefs regarding family and community involvement in general and in relation to specific involvement strategies. Findings provide general support for the effectiveness of the course. Recommendations emphasize the need to verify long term effects on preservice teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding parent and community involvement practices.

RESUME: La recherche a révélé que les écoles et les enseignants doivent prendre le *leadership* dans la planification et l'implantation de pratiques favorisant l'engagement des parents et de la communauté. Des auteurs ont montré que les expériences vécues dans le cadre de la formation initiale en enseignement contribuent au développement du sentiment de compétence des futurs enseignants à promouvoir l'engagement des familles et de la communauté. La présente recherche évaluative vise à examiner l'impact d'un programme québécois de partenariat école, famille et communauté sur les niveaux de connaissances et d'aisance des futurs enseignants dans le travail à effectuer avec les familles et la communauté, sur leurs attitudes personnelles et leurs croyances relatives à l'engagement des familles et de la communauté en général et en relation avec des stratégies d'engagement spécifiques.

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Les résultats soutiennent de manière générale l'efficacité de la formation. Les recommandations mettent l'accent sur la nécessité de vérifier les effets à long terme sur les connaissances, attitudes et croyances les futurs enseignants relativement aux pratiques visant à promouvoir l'engagement des parents et de la communauté.

Introduction

There is now evidence that family and community involvement contributes to students' success and development (Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Bertrand, 1997; Deslandes, 2000, 2001;Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). Research reveals that schools and teachers must take the leadership in planning and implementing parent and community involvement practices (Epstein, 2001). Studies by Morris, Taylor, Knight, & Wasson (1996) and Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed (2000) have shown that preservice and in-service course experiences contribute to enhance participants' perceptions of their competence levels in fostering family and community involvement. In Québec, a previous research conducted with preservice teachers enrolled in the fourth year of the education program at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières indicated low self-efficacy regarding specific and effective strategies for increased parental involvement, lack of knowledge about the impact of demographic characteristics on parental involvement, and lack of understanding of the community role in supporting the school (Deslandes, Rousseau & Royer, 2002). In her review of the literature, Deslandes (2001) identified various approaches and models on preparing teachers for family and community involvement. The context of a curriculum reform at the teacher education level across the Province of Quebec provided the opportunity for designing a training program (45 hours, 3-credit course) on school, family and community partnerships as one of the teacher education foundation courses.

Program

Description

The program was mainly inspired by the Harvard Family Research Project (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997), Chavkin and Williams' framework (1988), and works by other researchers (e.g., de Acosta, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2000; Morris,

Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1996; Pourtois & Desmet, 1997; Rice, 1998). The program had a four-section framework: personal, contextual, conceptual, and practical. The three-hour classes were offered during a 15-week period. At the first meeting, preservice teachers were given a course syllabus with descriptions of assignments and a series of relevant readings as well as additional references. The first assignment was to write a short autobiography in which to discuss the students' own families' involvement in their schooling. Since they participated in two separate observation weeks in schools during the semester, they were asked to report on what was being done in terms of school, family, and community practices. For the second assignment, a team of three or four preservice teachers with similar academic interests was asked to design a school, family, and community partnership program based on Epstein's framework. Topics such as the influence of family characteristics, diversity, values, and parenting style, as well as parents,' teachers,' and school principals' beliefs and perceptions on family involvement were discussed. There was much sharing of ideas and experiences, and reading assignments were discussed. Role playing was used as a pedagogical strategy to develop the skills and confidence needed to conduct parent-teacher conferences.

Objectives of the Program

The program objectives were inspired by Competency 9, one of the twelve professional competencies required of all preservice teachers by the Quebec Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2001, p. 113). Competency 9 reads as follows: "Co-operate with the school team, parents, various social partners, and students with a view to achieving the educational objectives of the school." The specific program objectives were related to contextual and conceptual, as well as personal and practical, aspects.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the impact of the school, family, and community partnerships program and was based on four research questions:

1) To what extent has the program or selected course influenced preservice teachers' perceptions of their comfort and competence levels in planning and implementing parent involvement programs?
2) To what extent has it influenced their attitudes toward parent involvement?

3) To what extent has it influenced their beliefs about the importance of specific parent and community involvement activities? and,
4) To what extent has it influenced their beliefs about the frequency of specific parent and community involvement activities?

Method

Participants

Participants were mainly first-year preservice teachers enrolled in the second session of a four-year education program at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Two different groups took the same course with two different professors. Participants were planning to teach at the elementary level, the secondary level, or to special needs students. The school, family, and community program is a required course for all education students, regardless of the program in which they are enrolled. All 78 students present at the first meeting agreed to participate in the study.

Measures

Teacher Report of Knowledge and Comfort Levels about Parent and Community Involvement Programs (Morris, Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1996; translated and adapted by Deslandes, Rousseau, & Royer, 2002). In its original version, the measure contains 11 items associated with conducting parent conferences, planning and implementing parent workshops, accessing resources needed to develop parent workshops, identifying strategies for involving families in school activities, and developing positive relations with parents. Seven other items were added on the influence of family characteristics on parental involvement and on the attitudes and skills necessary to work with families and community members. Examples include: "How comfortable are you with the process of developing positive relations with the parents of the children enrolled in your class?" or "How knowledgeable are you about the various ways of integrating members of the community into the life of your class? "The items were scored on a four-point scale from low (1) to high (4). The alpha reliability *Parental* score for the pre-test is .92, for the post-test, .91.

*Teacher Attitudes toward Parental Involvement (*Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2000). This scale consists of eight items measuring what teachers think

about parental involvement. Responses were rated on a six-point Likert scale, with 1 for disagree very strongly to 6 for agree very strongly. The alphas are .53 for the pre-test and .75, for the post-test.

Teacher Beliefs about the Importance of Specific Parent and Community Involvement Activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2000). To the original 16-item scale, six other items were developed with regard to extracurricular activities and community involvement. They were answered on a six-point scale (1 = disagree very strongly to 6 = agree very strongly). The alphas are .88 for the pre-test and .93 for the post-test.

Teacher Reports of Personal Practices for Inviting Parent and Community Involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2000). The scale measures to what extent preservice students plan to use the practices to develop parent and community involvement. Its final version consists of 21 items answered on a six-point scale (1 = disagree very strongly to 6 = agree very strongly). The alphas are .91.

Procedures

Following presentation of the study (but before the presentation of the course syllabus), the participants (after having signed a consent form) were administered a pre-test during the first week of January 2004. The same questionnaire was administered as a post-test at the last meeting of the two groups, which occurred during the last week of April 2004. Each questionnaire was coded and put in an envelope to assure confidentiality. Two open-ended questions were included in the post-test questionnaire: a) What is your perception of your present competencies regarding eventual work with (i) the parents of students in your class? and (ii) the members of the community? and, b) Since the beginning of the course, how have you changed your way of thinking and doing regarding your eventual work with (i) the parents? (ii) the members of the community?

Findings

Quantitative Data

Paired *t* tests were conducted to test the effects of the program. The overall scores (with Bonferroni corrections) and each item score of the four scales were used for comparisons. As suggested by Morris et al. (1996), we calculated an effect size (ES) estimate representing the

magnitude of change in standard deviation units with respect to the measure of knowledge and comfort levels about parent and community involvement programs. The purpose was to evaluate the degree to which change was related to the initial scores. Students with high and low scores were also compared (above and below the median scores) regarding attitudes about parental involvement in the pre-test and the degree of change in their knowledge and comfort levels between Time 1 and Time 2 of the study. However, no significant differences were identified suggesting that a more positive attitude at the beginning of the program did not influence the students' increase in knowledge and comfort levels about involvement programs.

Impact on Knowledge and Comfort Levels about Parent and Community Involvement Programs

Results indicate that participants increased their knowledge and comfort levels significantly over time, with respect to both their overall score and each of the individual items ($p < .000$). The correlation obtained between pre-test means and that of the ES was $r = -.77$, which implies that 59% ($.77^2$) of the variance in the change scores was attributable to the pre-test means. The pre-test means ranged from 1.78 to 3.17 / 4, whereas the post-test means varied from 2.92 to 3.66 / 4. The item that received the highest pre-test means was related to students' perceived ability to make a difference in the lives of the students in their class. The item receiving the highest score on the post-test concerned knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of parental involvement in the school activities of their children (3.66 / 4). The item with the lowest pre-test and post-test scores involved knowledge about the influence of demographic characteristics on parental involvement (1.78 / 4 and 2.92 / 4 respectively).

Table 1. Teacher Report on Knowledge and Comfort Levels about Parent and Community Involvement Programs Scale

	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M(SD)	*t*	df	*p*
Global Score	37.64	59.72	16.6	75	0
1. Knowledge of elements of an effective discussion/ conference with parents?	1.93 (.81)	3.46 (.55)	13.7	75	0
2. Comfort with ability to conduct conferences or interviews with parents?	2.37 (.78)	3.16 (.67)	7.53	75	.000
3. Comfort with ability to access resources for plan for 1 yr. school-family-community collaboration for class of students?	2.07 (.85)	3.26 (.66)	9.22	75	.000
4. Knowledge of strategies for parent-teacher conferences?	2.00 (.75)	3.59 (.55)	14.5	74	.000
5. Comfort with ability to plan/implement parent-teacher conferences?	2.07 (.84)	3.25 (.64)	10.2	75	.000
6. Knowledge of strategies to involve parents in school activities for children?	1.91 (.73)	3.45 (.58)	14.2	75	.000
7. Comfort with the process to develop positive relations with parents of students?	2.55 (.78)	3.37 (.61)	7.9	74	.000
8. Comfort with the ability to make to a difference in lives of students in class?	3.15 (.75)	3.52 (.58)	3.73	74	.000

9. Knowledge of advantages /disadvantages of parent involvement in school activities?	2.20 (.67)	3.66 (.55)	14.4	75	.000
10. Comfort with ability to encourage parents to be involved in school activities?	2.47 (.81)	3.32 (.66)	7.14	74	.000
11. Knowledge about various parent activities in school-based programs?	1.84 (.76)	3.55 (.69)	14.8	73	.000
12. Knowledge about various parent activities in home-based programs?	1.84 (.66)	3.45 (.67)	15.1	73	.000
13. Knowledge about the role of community to promote / support school's mission?	1.81 (.69)	3.43 (.64)	15.1	74	.000
14. Knowledge about the ways of integrating community in life of class?	2.04 (.75)	3.31 (.64)	10.3	73	.000
15. Knowledge about the influence of demographics on parent involvement?	1.78 (.76)	2.92 (.78)	9.58	75	.000
16. Have you developed attitudes & skills needed to work with parents / community?	1.85 (.77)	3.16 (.70)	11.8	74	.000
17. Knowledge of realities of immigrant families?	2.29 (.88)	2.93 (.74)	5.27	75	.000
18. Knowledge of work-shops schools offer parents?	1.79 (.76)	2.99 (.73)	9.75	75	.000

Change in Personal Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement

There were significant positive differences in the participants' global personal attitudes toward parental involvement ($p < .002$), particularly regarding two items ($p < .000$) related to the importance of parents as school partners and to the strengths that every family has that can be used to increase the child's success. One item suggesting that most parents know how to help their children with homework was also significantly improved ($p < .006$; Bonferroni correction: .05 / 8 = .006).

Table 2. Teacher Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement

	Pre-test M(SD)	Post-test M(SD)	*t*	df	*p*
Global Score	38.68 (4.23)	37.03	3.27	77	0
1. Most parents know how to help children with homework	2.71 (1.01)	2.84 (.947)	0.99	76	0
2. Every family has strengths that can be used to increase a child's chance of success in school	4.93 (.838)	5.34 (.740)	4.52	75	0
3. Parents can learn how to help their child with homework if they are shown how	4.96 (.802)	4.95 (1.03)	-0.1	76	0
4. Parental involvement is important to a good school	5.35 (.703)	5.53 (.680)	1.72	76	ns
5. Parental involvement can help increase effectiveness of teachers for a large number of students	5.30 (.693)	5.53 (.757)	2.16	75	0
6. Parents want to be involved	3.75 (.974)	4.24 (.998)	3.35	74	ns

7. Schools should consider parents as important partners	4.79 (.890)	4.99 (.979)	1.68	74	0
8. Parental involvement is important for a child's success in school	5.38 (.650)	5.49 (.788)	1.16	76	0

Beliefs about the Importance of Specific Parent and Community Involvement Activities

Only a change tendency was observed on the rating of the importance of specific family and community involvement activities (p <.053). There were significant changes in relation to the importance of assigning interactive homework (p < .000), of giving parents and students a repertoire of community resources (p < .001), and of inviting retired persons to help out in class or during extracurricular activities (p<.000).

Table 3. Teacher Beliefs About the Importance of Specific Parent and Community Involvement Activities

	Pre-test M(SD)	Post-test M(SD)	*t*	df	*p*
Global Score	114.65 (10.92)	117.16 (8.60)	1.96	76	.053
1. Give parents ideas for discussing TV programs with their child	4.63 (.936)	4.70 (.783)	-5.83	75	ns
2. Ask parents to help their child with homework	5.47 (.661)	5.42 (.676)	-.664	76	ns
3. Give parents ideas to help them intervene effectively with their child	5.45 (.640)	5.56 (.573)	1.304	76	ns
4. Schedule a meeting with the parents of each student at least once a year	5.70 (.488)	5.56 (.910)	-1.258	76	ns

5. Request parents to ask their child about his/her day in school	5.48 (.641)	5.58 (.615)	1.210	76	ns
6. Communicate with parents when their child does something well or shows improvement	5.57 (.77)	5.55 (.637)	-.276	76	ns
7. Suggest ways to study spelling, math, or other subjects at home before a test	5.63 (.562)	5.51 (.643)	-1.452	75	ns
8. Invite parents to visit class	5.31 (.862)	5.28 (1.025)	-.660	76	ns
9. Send parents "letters" indicating what the children are learning and doing in class	5.04 (.952)	5.29 (.809)	1.986	76	.05
10. Involve parents as volunteer workers in class	4.83 (1.044)	5.08 (1.097)	1.797	76	.08
11. Give parents specific activities to practice with their child to improve his/her class performance	5.25 (.672)	5.39 (.781)	1.331	76	ns
12. Ask parents to listen to their child read aloud	5.40 (.591)	5.39 (.781)	-.145	76	ns
13. Ask parents to take their child to the library or to community activities	5.17 (.768)	5.18 (.739)	.136	76	ns
14. Inform parents about the skills their child needs to learn in each subject taught	5.19 (.726)	5.30 (.727)	.882	76	ns
15. Communicate with parents regarding their child's problems / failures	5.57 (.548)	5.58 (.593)	.159	76	ns

16. Assign homework that calls for parent-child interaction	4.90 (.940)	5.32 (.818)	3.841	76	.000
17. Give parents and students a repertoire of community resources	4.99 (.786)	5.35 (.786)	3.482	76	.001
18. Help parents locate and use community resources	5.12 (.628)	5.27 (.868)	1.466	76	ns
19. Invite retired persons to help in class or in extra-curricular activities	4.71 (.886)	5.19 (.762)	3.767	76	.000
20. Organize workshops / presentations in class with people from the community	5.06 (.695)	5.29 (.792)	2.158	76	.034
21. Inform parents about activities in the community related to development of talents and learning skills	5.09 (.653)	5.32 (.733)	2.643	76	.010
22. Work with community organizations to better understand the educative practices of immigrant families	5.08 (.774)	5.22 (.774)	1.258	76	ns

Reports on Practices Planned by Staff for Inviting Parental and Community Involvement

There were no significant differences on the total frequency score associated with planning different practices involving parents and the community. Participants reported the intention to use the following specific practice more frequently ($p < .003$): invitation of retired people into the classroom.

Table 4. Teacher Reports of Personal Practices for Inviting Parent and Community Involvement

	Pre-test M(SD)	Post-test M(SD)	*t*	df	*p*
Global Score	74.75 (13.49)	74.75 (13.12)	.067	76	ns
1. Involve parents as volunteer workers in class	3.49 (1.14)	3.73 (1.12)	1.87	75	.06
2. Communicate with parents if their child does something well or shows improvement	4.11 (.988)	4.21 (.943)	.86	76	ns
3. Give parents ideas to help them intervene more effectively with their child	3.41 (.912)	3.41 (.897)	.00	76	ns
4. Schedule meetings with a parent	3.24 (.589)	3.33 (.684)	1.22	75	ns
5. Suggest ways to study spelling, math, other subjects at home before tests	3.62 (1.25)	3.25 (1.06)	-2.30	76	.02
6. Encourage parents to ask their child about his/her day in school	4.34 (1.52)	4.25 (1.61)	-.45	76	ns
7. Inform parents about the skills their child needs to develop for each subject taught	3.32 (1.11)	3.13 (1.04)	-1.21	77	ns
8. Send parents letters indicating what the children are learning / doing in class	3.52 (.954)	3.55 (.882)	.199	77	ns
9. Ask parents to listen to their child read aloud	4.56 (1.28)	4.41 (1.63)	-.83	71	ns

10. Give parents ideas for discussing specific TV programs with their child	3.17 (1.19)	3.09 (1.21)	-.50	75	ns
11. Invite a parent to visit my class	2.64 (.875)	2.89 (1.07)	2.16	76	.03
12. Give parents specific activities to practice with their child to improve his/her class performance	3.69 (1.05)	3.59 (1.02)	-.70	75	ns
13. Ask parents to take their child to the library or to community activities	3.64 (1.15)	3.30 (1.15)	-2.38	73	.02
14. Ask parents to help their child with homework	4.76 (1.51)	4.76 (1.46)	.00	75	ns
15. Communicate with parents if their child is having problems or living certain experiences	4.54 (1.51)	4.60 (.88)	.39	72	ns
16. Assign homework that requires parent-child interaction	4.63 (.98)	4.72 (.88)	.58	76	ns
17. Give parents and students a repertoire of community resources	2.83 (.96)	2.60 (.95)	-1.77	77	.08
18. Help parents locate and use community resources	2.87 (.99)	2.55 (.82)	-2.51	76	.01
19. Invite retired persons to help in class or in extra-curricular activities	3.05 (1.18)	3.53 (1.02)	3.12	77	.003
20. Organize workshops / presentations in class with people from the community	3.25 (.87)	3.41 (.91)	1.32	76	ns

21. Inform parents about community activities related to the development of talents / learning skills	3.25 (.99)	2.87 (1.03)	-2.63	77	.01

Qualitative Data

The two groups of preservice teachers were invited to respond to two open-ended questions. The first question, which was divided into two parts, dealt primarily with perceptions of their current abilities in work with a) the parents of students in a class and b) the members of the community. The second question concerned the changes in their ways of thinking and doing regarding eventual work, first with parents and then with members of the community (see Table 5).

Table 5. Participants Under Study for Each Part of the Open-Ended Questions in the Questionnaire.

Number of Participants	First Question Perception of Current Abilities in Work With:	Second Question Change in Their Way of Thinking or Doing With:
First Group (N = 52)	Parents (N = 46) Community (N = 44)	Parents (N = 44) Community (N = 44)
Second Group (N = 37)	Parents (N = 29) Community (N = 28)	Parents (N = 27) Community (N = 26)
Total = 89	Parents (N = 75) Community (N = 72)	Parents (N = 71) Community (N = 70)

In the first group of 52 preservice teachers, 46 answered the first part of the question on how they perceived their current abilities for working with parents, and 44 answered the second part on how they perceived their current abilities for working with members of the community. With respect to the second open-ended question, 44 preservice teachers responded on changes in their ways of thinking and doing relative to both parents and members of the community. In the second group of 37 preservice teachers, 29 answered the first part of the question on how they perceived their current abilities for working with parents, and 28 answered the second part on how they perceived their current abilities

for working with members of the community. With respect to the second open-ended question, 27 preservice teachers responded about changes in their ways of thinking and doing regarding eventual work with parents, and 26 responded about the same changes regarding eventual work with members of the community.

The comments of the preservice teachers were coded into units of meaning. An analysis of the corpus of units of meaning allowed us to pinpoint three main categories: a) perception of current abilities termed Competence, b) modification, and c) contribution of the School, Family, and Community Partnerships Program.

Competence. This category includes all statements concerning the participants' perception of their current abilities. It is divided into two sections relative to their eventual work with: a) parents of the students in a class (Competence/Parents) and b) members of the community (Competence/Community).

Competence/Parents. This category includes all statements concerning the participants' perception of their current abilities relative to work with the parents of students in a future class. Of the 66 coded statements in this category, 43 indicated feelings of competence. Some examples follow:

> "*I feel fully prepared and equipped to meet the parents of the students*" [102-1A].
>
> "*I have a positive view of my ability to work with parents. Of course, I'll get much better with experience. But I know what I need to start*" [138-1A].

Other statements (N= 16) indicated that some participants felt moderately competent. A few comments include:

> "*I think my abilities have developed significantly, but there's a big gap between theory and practice*" [122-1A].
>
> "*I have a lot of theoretical knowledge. I would feel more comfortable putting this into practice before analyzing my abilities in terms of doing and being*" [122-1A].

Finally, some preservice teachers felt they were not yet competent, as indicated by the following statements:

> "*I believe that parents are an integral part of the school environment and that they have an important role to play. However, I still have problems communicating with them, even though I think this is important*" [114-1A].

"*I have an idea of what I'm going to do, but I still don't feel comfortable with it!*" [143-1A].

Competence/Community. This category included 49 statements on how the participants perceive their current abilities for eventual work with members of the community. Exactly 30 statements indicated they felt confident about creating links with the community:

"*I'm a bit anxious, but I think I'm able to get over the fear*" [105-1B].

"*I won't wait for the community to come to me, I'll make the first move and invite them here*" [127-1B].

"*I can manage to find the resources I want*" [217-1B].

However, 17 statements showed that some preservice teachers felt less comfortable with the community than with the parents:

"*I think I'm a bit less comfortable using their resources. In fact, I don't always know how to enlist their participation*" [106-1B].

"*I feel it's a good idea to integrate the members of the community. On the other hand, I think I would find it difficult to get them interested in coming to work with the class*" [139-1B].

A preservice teacher observed:

"*I'm well informed about the contribution they can make to a class, but I'm still reluctant to communicate with them*" (145-1B),

and another said he doesn't care at all for the designation "*community*:"

"*I have a problem with the word 'community.' It's not precise and descriptive enough. I don't like it. Personally, I don't feel I'm ready to act outside the school yet*" (146-1B).

Modification. This two-part category included statements by preservice teachers concerning changes in their thinking and doing regarding their eventual work with a) parents and b) the community.

Modification/With the Parents. This category included all statements (N= 52) by preservice teachers concerning changes to their thinking and doing in eventual work with parents. One of them said: "*I've always fantasized about a friendly parent-teacher relationship. Today, I've come to realize that meetings can be difficult and that they have to be prepared*" (103-2A). Another observed: "*Parents are essential for the child's success, and the school has a hard time achieving its goals when the parents are not involved.*" (135-2A). However, five statements by preservice teachers indicated they had not modified their thinking about the role of parents in a class or a school. An example:

"*I haven't really changed my way of thinking. My parents had a relationship, or rather a collaboration, with the school, so I knew this was something to aim for*" (110-2A).

Modification /With the Community. This category included the statements of preservice teachers about modifications of their way of thinking and doing in eventual work with members of the community. Exactly 37 statements fell into this category, for example:

"*Before, I didn't understand the importance of community involvement in the school. Now I see that the role of the school is more important than simply transmitting information. The involvement of the community is invaluable.*" (120-2B)

"*I didn't know that a community could become involved like that in a school.*" (123-2B)

"*I know now that the community can be very useful in the education of students. People can contribute advice, resources, aid and availability.*" (103-1B)

But one preservice teacher declared: "*It's still vague. I'll wait to feel comfortable in the school before worrying about what's going on somewhere else*" (146-2B). A few participants (N= 3) stated they had not changed their way of thinking about the role of the community in a class or school. One participant even revealed he was aware that members of the community want to become involved in the school and that it is often the teacher who turns them down (130-2B)

Contribution of the School, Family, and Community Partnerships Program. This category included the comments (N= 24) of the preservice teachers concerning the contribution of the course. For instance, one participant stated: "*I learned to tread very carefully, to note each person's strong points before focusing on his weaknesses*" (124-1A). Another added:

"*I feel this course taught me many things. I think I'll be more comfortable communicating with the parents of my students. I'll ask them for support to help me in class, and I won't have any problem in discussions with them.*" (139-1A)

A third observed:

"*I was really able to understand that attitudes are very important. Especially since family situations can differ greatly from one child to another, and that sometimes our personal*

judgments are too hasty or just plain wrong. So we have to try to vary our approaches" (207-2A).

Conclusions

Summary

Our findings provide support for the relevance of offering a school, family, and community foundation course at the beginning of a preservice teacher formation. To our knowledge, no other teacher education program in the Province of Quebec currently offers a foundation course focusing on school, family, and community partnerships. The results of our study are therefore likely to shed light on some effective elements that should be included in a course of this nature. Concerning the first question on the impact of the course, the data suggest that participation was effective in significantly improving preservice teachers' knowledge and comfort levels about planning and implementing parent involvement programs. For example, participants reported being more knowledgeable and feeling more comfortable about conducting effective conferences or workshops with parents, using strategies to involve families and community members in school activities and implementing family and community involvement programs. Participants developed knowledge about the advantages and challenges associated with family and community involvement, the community resources available to support the school, and the influence of demographic characteristics (including multi-ethnicity) on parental involvement.

As for the second question on potential changes in personal attitudes toward parental involvement, preservice teachers reported being more aware of the importance of families as partners and of the family strengths that can help children improve their chances of success. With regard to the third question on beliefs about the importance of specific parent and community involvement activities, the participants understood the value of specific activities such as assigning interactive homework, inviting retired people into the classroom, or giving information to the families about community resources. Finally, with respect to the fourth question on their beliefs about the frequency of specific parent and community involvement activities, the only significant change related to inviting retired people into the classroom more often. Obviously, this is mere speculation at this stage, since the participants have not had their own classrooms. The qualitative data reinforce the above findings. Even though participants appear confident

about their future work with families and community, an important question remains: Will they be able to transfer or apply what they have learned and practiced to their next practicum experiences? Will the observed attitude changes persist through to the end of their teacher education and in into their real-life practice? It may be a good idea to create a reflection activity during the *synthesis seminar* at the end of the fourth year of the teacher education program, in April 2007, to see if preservice teachers have continued to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to work with families and the community in the best interest of children.

Implications for Practice

As expected, we review and strive to improve practical learning experiences each semester. In fall 2005, we managed to include several case studies based on real-life situations requiring preservice teachers to work in teams and exchange ideas and solutions. A few examples are given at the end of the text. The first case study focuses on the involvement of parents from a low socioeconomic level. The second group of case studies deals with certain communication issues and the third, with ethnic minority parents and parental involvement. We also invited immigrant parents into one of our classes. Many immigrants in Trois-Rivieres come from Mexico and South America. The objective was not to learn about immigration laws, but about how to communicate with the immigrant parents of students enrolled in Quebec schools. As well, we identified other challenges related to the school, family, and community partnerships program we are involved with. For instance, there are preservice teachers within the same group planning to teach elementary, secondary, and special education students. A few others are interested in becoming spiritual or community facilitators. Such diversity is both challenging and enriching. Other projects are now being developed. We are currently designing a course on school, family, and community partnerships as part of a 30-credit inservice teacher education program (in collaboration with the psychology, specialized education, and physical education departments) that will be offered at the regional level and, possibly, in other French-speaking countries.

Case Study 1

During your first year of teaching, you obtain a position in cycle __ of primary school. The community is particularly poor, both materially and culturally. About 70% of the parents have little education (no high school diploma) and half of them live on welfare. You believe, in keeping with numerous researches on the subject, that all parents want their child to succeed in school. Above all, these adults do not want their child to repeat their own experience, characterized by a lack of social advancement, socioeconomic status or social recognition. How do you intend to help these poorly educated parents monitor their children's school work so as to improve the children's chances of success?

Expectations:

a) Make a list of various actions and attitudes that would encourage the parents to cooperate with you in fostering their children's success in school;
b) Identify the actions and attitudes to avoid;
c) Add a few quotations that you have underscored during your readings.

Duration: 45 to 60 minutes

Procedure: Team of 4 persons, depending on cycle retained

a) All cycles must be chosen;
b) Those teaching or intending to teach at the secondary level must work together.

Return in a large group:

a) Pinpoint the actions and attitudes (with reference to citations);
b) Observe the differences among cycles (if necessary);
c) Record your results: the responses to this work should form a reference tool you can turn to during your internships as well as in your future career.

Case Study 2

Parents' Messages – Replies:

Procedure :

For each message, comments in a dyad (a few minutes)

a) Three students are chosen at random to represent the teacher who received the message and two colleagues in assistance;
b) The other students are invited to give their opinion afterwards and complete these hypotheses.

Expectations:

No one particular reply is expected, however certain *principles* must be taken into account. These involve:

a) communication (criticism) and rules that have already been established, learned and applied (proactive actions);
b) teaching experience in class (climate in class);
c) the parent (living conditions, etc.) and the student (age, abilities, etc.);
d) the number of times a particular situation occurs (isolated or habitual occurrence);
e) the method of communication you judge to be most effective.

(i) A parent will not allow her/his child to go on a class outing. This is a punishment imposed by the parent.

> *I don't want Natacha to go to the Museum of Art. I think she needs to work more than to go out. Besides, she doesn't listen to me at home, so she doesn't deserve this treat. Give her work for the afternoon, and I'll take care of her. (Natacha is hyperactive.).* Received from Natacha's mother, November 15th.

(ii) A parent notifies you that her/his child will be absent for a week because the parents are taking the child on a trip (before the break). This student has problems in school.

> *Hello Nadia,*
>
> *We're taking Delphine on vacation down south for two weeks, from February 21 to March 4. Since the school break occurs during this time, our daughter will only be absent 4 days (Monday, March 7th is a professional development day). I would like you to give her assignments, and I'll make sure she does them. Thank you for your understanding.*
>
> *Delphine's mother*

(iii) A parent feels her/his child is wasting her time in school.

> *Hello Mr. Gilbert,*
>
> *Ever since the year started, my daughter Marie-Pierre has been telling me she's wasting her time in school. She always finishes her work before the others, she says it's easy. She told me you*

said she should read from her text book while waiting for the others, but she gets a little tired reading all this time. What do you advise? I'm waiting to hear from you, I'm afraid my daughter will drop out.
Thank you. Bernadette

Case Study 3

1. Hamadi Ben Omar is a Québécois from Morocco. He often skips school to work in his father's garage. He has fairly serious learning disabilities.

   How would you approach the father?

2. Amour Hilaire is a Québécoise from Haiti. Besides going to school, she is obliged to work weekends to help support her large family. The parents are divorced, and the eldest brother has taken on the role of head of the family.

   You ask the mother to come during your free period at 10 a.m., and the brother shows up at 4:18 p.m. You're ready to hit the roof – you have a heavy schedule and this morning you wasted precious time.

   What information would help you communicate without getting upset?

3. Angelo Pérez Lopez is a Québécois from Mexico. He's an inveterate crooner who announces to one and all that he doesn't need to study because he'll be taking over his father's restaurant.

   Your personal thought: "Who does he think he is? He probably thinks he can get all the girls he wants with his sheep's eyes and restaurant."

   You arrange to meet his parents at 4 p.m. Tuesday, and they show up at 4 p.m. Thursday.

   What information would help you understand their attitude?

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