USING HOME VISITS TO CONNECT WITH FAMILIES: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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PROJECT

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USING HOME VISITS TO CONNECT WITH FAMILIES: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

A Project

by

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Abstract

of

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Federal guidelines mandate that schools find meaningful ways to communicate with families. One of the most effective means of communication is the home visit. This project uses classroom action research in home visits using the model developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project to document the effectiveness of home visits and provide a handbook for special education teachers at Vineland Preschool. The handbook is designed to assuage the fears of educators and provide effective tools for using home visits to improve the quality of classroom instruction. This project concludes that home visits are a particularly effective means of engaging parents in the education of their children and are particularly meaningful when educators treat each individual visit as a unique experience. Home visits should be strongly encouraged at all levels and teachers provided tools to train allow them to make use of the information gained during home visits to transform teaching practice in all areas.

_________________________________, Committee Chair
Rachael Gonzales, Ed.D.

_________________________________
Date

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DEDICATION

To my wonderful, amazing, loving, supportive, genius husband Dr. Jon D. Rossini, Ph.D.

Thank you for always being by my side and loving me for who I am.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge the members of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento, CA who first introduced me to “home visits”. Although I had been visiting the homes of my students for many years prior to meeting them, the members of the PTHVP helped me put into words the reasons WHY I was visiting my students and WHAT I was trying to accomplish by doing so. I cannot thank them enough for teaching me everything they knew about home visits and for allowing me to find my own way as well.

I would also like to take the time to acknowledge every student that I have ever taught in my 13 years as an educator. I may not always remember your names, but your faces and your laughter are forever emblazoned on my heart. I will never forget all that you have taught me and look forward to all that you will teach me in the years to come.

I also want to acknowledge the parents of my wonderful students. Thank you for entrusting to me your most precious possession. I am forever grateful to you for the faith you put in me as your child’s teacher and for the love and appreciation you have shown me over the years. You opened your homes and your hearts to me. Always remember that you are your child’s most important teacher and you have been mine as well!

It would be a crime if I did not acknowledge and give thanks to my father Brian Ramsay and my husband Dr. Jon D. Rossini. I am very lucky to have not one, but two amazing men in my life who have always supported me unconditionally. You’ve put up with the crazed 3:00 am rantings and the “I’ll never get this finished” tirades. Through
all you never lost faith in me and more importantly made sure that I never lost faith in myself. I love you both very much.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge Dr. Rachael Gonzales, my advisor and teacher at California State University, Sacramento. Seven years ago, Dr. Gonzales was the first professor I met at CSUS. She welcomed me into the credential program, three years later took me on as her Master’s student, and four years later has helped me to finally bring to fruition a project that is near and dear to both of our hearts.
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Accomplished teachers constantly strive to improve their craft – teaching. They reflect on their daily practice and ask themselves, “Am I meeting the needs of my students?” With the growing demands for more accountability in schools, school districts scrambling to meet federal and state mandates to align curriculum to standards, and teachers struggling to prepare their students for the high-stakes end-of-year testing, more and more teachers are feeling like the reason they got into teaching is disappearing along with their autonomy.

Where once teachers were able to seek out professional development in areas that they were interested in or that were relevant to their current teaching positions, now professional development is frequently determined by school districts and is directly related to curricula adopted by the district and aligned to state standards. There is little time or money allocated to allow teachers to pursue professional development in an area that they care about or want to learn more about. Consequently, teachers are less engaged by the professional development they do receive and are turning their backs on administrators who push the district’s agenda on their activities outside of their teaching day. In his article “Model Teachers,” Douglas B. Reeves (2009) found the majority of teachers surveyed responded that internal factors such as students, personal experience, colleagues, and family most influenced their practice and that they were indifferent to curriculum, school leadership, and other such professional development.
Reeves (2009) continues by stating that teachers rated direct modeling from colleagues as the most influential of the internal factors influencing their teaching practice and poses the question, “Does this mean that the teacher next door is potentially more influential than books and lectures? Yes” (p. 1). Reeves (2009) discovered an important element to the question of professional development: less may actually be more. Teachers may be better served by being encouraged to provide their own professional development and, even more importantly, by sharing it with their colleagues. Professional endeavors that are directly related to their classrooms and daily practice are not only more likely to engage teachers but also are more likely to influence other teachers.

One way that teachers can take back ownership of their own professional development is with Action Research. Stringer (2007) defines Action Research as “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” that “may increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are engaged” (p. 1). In the context of the classroom, Classroom Action Research (CAR) allows teachers to “focus on what we value most, prioritize, and seek to achieve” (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005, p. 5). Teachers can use CAR to answer a question or solve a problem directly related to their teaching, classroom, and students and then reflect on their findings and apply what they learned to improve their teaching practice. They can also share their research with other colleagues who are experiencing similar problems in their own daily practice.
One of the key benefits of CAR is that it allows teachers to formulate hypotheses for investigation that are directly related to the conditions of their classroom and structure an investigation that allows them to directly study the most pertinent and potentially productive sites for improvement. In a broader format, teachers could also use CAR to address more holistic questions related to their school or even their school district, including the most effective ways of involving parents in the classroom.

In fact, one of the most pressing issues in schools today is parent involvement given the increasing reduction in resources and the heightened expectations for student productivity. Schools are trying to get parents more involved in their child’s education in an attempt to improve student achievement and retention. Much of the pressure schools are receiving about parent involvement is directly related to the language in Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Title I specifically targets students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and demands that schools do more to engage the families of these students and break down the barriers preventing them from being more involved in their child’s education. The legislation does not, however, delegate how schools should go about encouraging families to get more involved, and it is a daunting task indeed. Today’s students face many challenges that put them at a disadvantage while at school in addition to making it more difficult for their families to get involved at school. Such challenges include being from one-parent families, being raised by relatives or foster parents, living in poverty, or coming from a home where English is not their native language. Despite all of these challenges, schools must find a way to reach the families of all of their
students and encourage them to be more involved in the day-to-day academic lives of their children.

Background of the Problem

In California, like the nation, many of the students attending our low achieving schools come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes or homes where English is a second language. In the Twin Rivers Unified School District, 79% of the 27,000 students attending preschool through adult education programs are eligible to receive free or reduced lunches (Twin Rivers Unified School District, 2010). In their 2006-08 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates the U.S. Census Bureau lists the number of people over the age of five in the United States who spoke a language other than English in their home as 55,076,078, indicating that non-English speakers make up approximately 19.6% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau). This significant number of non-English speakers has had a profound effect on our public schools. During the 2007-08 school year 1,526,036 students received English Language Learner services in California alone (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition).

Extensive research has shown that the more a parent is involved in their child’s education, the greater the child’s academic achievement will be (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Nelson & Guerra, 2010; Sheldon, 2007). Stronger parent involvement results in improved attendance, increased academic achievement, and a decrease in behavior problems (Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). As a result of decades of research, NCLB demands that schools make a concerted effort to involve
parents in their child’s education in ways that are meaningful with the purpose of increasing academic achievement (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

But, the law does not specify what parent involvement should look like. Parent involvement can manifest in many different ways and fall anywhere on a spectrum from passive to active (Berger, 1991; Epstein et al., 2002). Epstein et al. (2002) has identified six different types of parent involvement and states that schools can do a variety of things to encourage each one. These types of parent involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Many schools stress parent involvement like homework help, participation in the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA), volunteering in the classroom or chaperoning on field trips, and attending Parent/Teacher conferences (Sheldon, 2003). But there are still some parents who do not participate in these activities. Sheldon argues that the reason some parents do not participate in these activities is not lack of interest but because these types of involvement are biased towards certain parents. According to Sheldon, families in which the mother works full time are less likely to attend evening events at school. In addition, parents who have less education are less likely to recognize their own ability to influence and affect their child’s education and therefore do not spend time reading to their child or helping with homework. Sheldon concludes that unless schools make every attempt to involve all parents, achievement for all students will never come to fruition.

In order to reach these elusive parents, many schools are striving to go beyond homework help and school committees to involvement and engage parents on a deeper,
more meaningful level (Epstein, 1987; Nelson & Guerra, 2010). Many times, it is the
children of these parents who are struggling the most in school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991;
National PTA; Jonson, 1999; Wherry, 2009).

Parents, too, are struggling with how best to support their child’s education
(National PTA, Wherry, 2009). Traditionally, families consisted of two-parent
households that were financially stable with the income provided by one parent while the
other parent focused more on raising the children (Berger, 1991; Jonson, 1999). In
today’s society, this is no longer true. Many students in our schools come from one-
parent families struggling to survive financially, live in foster care, are homeless, or
whose caregivers struggle with substance abuse and are not able to focus on their child’s
education (Jonson, 1999). According to Jonson, many families whose first language is a
language other than English have difficulty communicating with their child’s school and
although they want to be more involved, may not know how.

As academic standards and performance expectations for students become loftier,
many parents are left feeling ill equipped to support their child’s learning (Wherry,
2009). Wherry continues by saying that still others shy away from coming to school
because of their own past experiences with schools. The question is, what can schools do
to reach all of the parents of all of their students given that there are many barriers to
parent involvement?
Statement of the Problem

For a variety of reasons, there is a disconnection between school and home. Many teachers feel that they are trying to reach out to parents but that the parents do not meet them half way (Wherry, 2009). On the other side, parents feel that every time they hear from the school, it is because their child is misbehaving or failing. This lack of true communication between families and schools becomes more urgent as the pressure for every student to achieve in school grows as a result of NCLB.

Schools are trying desperately to reestablish the connection with their students and their families in a variety of ways. Activities such as Meet the Teacher Night, Open House, Scholastic Book Fairs, Homework Clinics, and membership in the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) are appealing to some parents, but these activities are not reaching parents who speak a language other than English, work nights, or who do not feel comfortable at school events. To reach these elusive parents, many schools are turning to a program in which the teacher directly engages the parents on their own turf: home visits.

There is a growing movement to make the interactions between schools and families more personal in order to help both sides better understand one another. Home visits are one strategy that has developed out of this need to build strong relationships with families and have been proven to be effective not only in improving the relationship that schools have with parents, but also in improving test scores, decreasing truancy, motivating students to stay in school, and empowering parents to have a strong presence in the education of their children (http://www.pthvp.org/).
While individual schools and districts may choose to approach home visits in a variety of ways, one outstanding model which was developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) in Sacramento, CA is not only being utilized in Sacramento but also by school districts across the country as members of the PTHVP travel across the United States to train teachers in their two-visit model.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to develop tools for fostering stronger relationships with parents and students using Classroom Action Research in coordination with information garnered from home visits (based on the tenets of the PTHVP home visit model). The end product of this research is a handbook for the educators at the researcher’s school site (Vineland Preschool) that outlines the home visit model developed by the PTHVP and provides tools to assist educators in carrying out effective home visits as well as reflecting on and effectively employing the knowledge gained from these visits. These tools include strategies for reducing the anxiety educators may have and encouraging them to step beyond their comfort zone, all in the name of building stronger relationships with the families of their students. The content of this handbook builds upon and develops information provided to participants at oral presentations for training in the PTHVP home visit model.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is Classroom Action Research. Action Research can be defined as inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual (Johnson, 2005). With regards to the classroom, “Classroom Action Research (CAR) is systematic inquiry with the goal of informing practice in a particular situation. CAR is a way for instructors to discover what works best in their own classroom situation, thus allowing informed decisions about teaching” (Mettetal, 2002).

There are many steps in CAR (Holly, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Mettetal, 2002; Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2007). These steps include identifying a research question, reviewing the literature, planning a method of data collection, collecting data, analyzing data, taking action based on results, and sharing results (Johnson, 2005; Mettetal, 2002).

CAR begins when a teacher poses a research question related to their classroom or to their teaching that they want to know the answer to. For example, a teacher may pose the question, “Does exercise have any benefit on the academic achievement of my students?” Once the teacher has formulated the question, they create a systematic plan for how they will go about researching their topic. Research involves data collection and therefore a teacher employing CAR needs to collect data related to the question they are looking to answer. In the example above, the teacher may begin collecting her data by looking at the test scores of her students without any exercise occurring prior to the assessment and compare that data to test scores when the assessment was given after the students participated in some kind of exercise. Other methods of data collection include
interviews, pre and post assessments, surveys, reflection journals, questionnaires, and checklists (Ferrance, 2000; Johnson, 2003; Mettetal, 2002; Stringer, 2007).

CAR is an effective methodology for teachers because it can directly improve their teaching and provide a better understanding of their students (Ferrance, 2000; Kern & Levin, 2009; Mettatal, 2001; Rogers et al., 2007). This methodology is at its best when the teacher doing the research has chosen a topic that is important and meaningful to them based on their students or daily practice. When one is invested in the research, one is more motivated to follow through with their plan and be more likely to carefully and objectively reflect on the data being collected and what its significance is in relation to the question being posed (Reeves, 2009).

Assumptions

Prior to beginning the investigation, the researcher made several assumptions about the process. The first assumption made is that all families, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or socio-economic background, are interested in their child’s education and want their child to be as successful in school as possible. Additionally, the researcher assumed that once other teachers heard testimonials from fellow teachers as well as parents about the value of home visits and had an opportunity to talk about their fears and assumptions, they too would see the value of making visits and pledge to begin making home visits a part of their routine. It was also assumed that all teachers had the desire to make the connection between home and school stronger. Lastly, it was assumed that the self-reflection required of this endeavor would be a valuable learning experience
for the researcher as well as for her colleagues and cause them to make positive changes in their own habits as an educator of young children with disabilities.

Justifications

This research has the capacity to be a valuable source of information for other teachers, regardless of grade level or specialty. It will demonstrate how making personal connections with families through home visits can help one to become a better teacher and provide teachers with a practical, hands-on tool that can be easily followed and utilized when making visits to the homes of their students. Because of the uniqueness of the researcher’s school site, this research is particularly valuable for the staff at Vineland Preschool in the Twin Rivers Unified School District where every Friday afternoon, teachers have the opportunity to make visits to the homes of their students, should they desire to do so.

Limitations

This research has some limitations that should be noted. Because this research focuses on the use of one particular model of home visits, it will be subject to the narrow viewpoint of that one model. This research in no way implies that the two-visit home visit model developed by the PTHVP is the best model for making home visits; individual schools and school districts should decide what works best given their population of families, students, and teachers. In addition, participation in home visits should be voluntary not only for families but also for teachers. If all parties do not see
the value of building stronger connections between home and school, or if they do not believe that home visits will indeed make these connections, then they should not be forced to participate.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction
A review of the literature is important in order to properly understand this research. A discussion of Action Research as it pertains to education, the importance of parent involvement, and home visits will be presented in this chapter so that the reader has the necessary background knowledge of the subject matter.

Origins of Action Research

Scholars (Adelman, 1993; Mills 2007; Ferrance, 2000; McFarland & Stansell, 1993; Smith, 2001) in the field trace the origin of the term “Action Research” to Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who in the 1930s and ‘40s studied the relationship between autocracy and democracy in the workplace. Smith’s (2001) research on Lewin suggests that Lewin was especially interested in social change and group dynamics and that in his various social experiments, he investigated social problems including prejudice and conflict in the work place. Another author, Burns (2007) suggests that in order to test his theories, it was necessary for Lewin to move his experiments from the laboratory into the field and directly involve the workers. From 1939 to 1947, Lewin completed a series of experiments at the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation’s plant in Marion, Virginia (Burnes, 2007). According to Burnes, Lewin was a friend of the plant’s owner and had been invited to observe the day-to-day workings of the plant in order to make suggestions.
about employee retention and increasing productivity among the workers. During the experiments at the Harwood plant which involved nearly all of the 600 workers and most of the management staff, Lewin and his colleagues made several discoveries involving group decision making, self-management, and overcoming resistance to change (Burnes, 2007). Adelman (1993) believes that as a result of these experiments, Lewin declared that democratic group-decision making resulted in improved morale amongst workers and higher productivity of the group as a whole. Bargal (2008) states that these findings had far reaching implications for promoting social change and political action.

According to Mills (2007), Lewin coined the term Action Research and divided it into four categories: diagnostic action research, participant action research, empirical action research, and experimental action research. Adelman (1993) states,

Action research for Lewin was exemplified by the discussion of problems followed by group decisions on how to proceed. Action research must include the active participation by those who have to carry out the work in the exploration of problems that they identify and anticipate. After investigation of these problems the group makes decisions, monitoring and keeping note of the consequences. Regular reviews of progress follow. (p. 9)

Lewin recognized that much could be accomplished when people were actively involved in solving their own problems or the problems that affected the group that they were involved in. Much like the workers at the Harwood plant, being actively involved in their own problem solving can help educators be more engaged and productive (Adelman, 1993).
Origins of Classroom Action Research

The results of Lewin’s social experiments at the Harwood plant as well as throughout his career have had long lasting influences on education and school reform (Adelman, 1993; Sherman, Schmuck, & Schmuck, 2006). What started out as investigations into group dynamics in the work place and how groups could solve their own problems if given the autonomy to do so, evolved into a methodology employed by individual educators in their own classrooms desiring to research problems related to their students and their daily practice.

Action Research in education first began in the 1950s when it was used by teachers as a method of applying scientific inquiry in their investigation of problems related to their classrooms (Hammersley, 2004). According to Hammersley, Action Research at this stage was mostly quantitative and therefore difficult to adapt to the classroom. Because of the impracticality of the methodology, Action Research quickly fell out of fashion only to be reinvented again in Britain in the late 1960s and early ’70s by Lawrence Stenhouse and John Elliot (Hammersley, 2004). In *A Short Guide to Action Research*, Andrew P. Johnson (2005) defines Action Research as

> the process of studying a real school or classroom situation to understand and improve the quality of actions or instruction. It is a systematic and orderly way for teachers to observe their practice or to explore a problem and a possible course of action. (p. 21)

Action Research can be employed by a single educator, a group of educators, or district administrators who want to answer a question related to their classroom, school, or district and involves systematic investigation, data collection and analysis resulting in
student achievement, improved teaching practice, and/or school reform (Ferrance, 2000; Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Mills, 2007). Action Research provides opportunities to investigate classroom-related issues that teachers value because Action Research employs methodology that teachers select and is directly related to their own professional practice and current students (Ferrance, 2000; Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Kern & Levin, 2009; Stringer, 2007). And because it is a data-driven endeavor requiring systematic implementation, Action Research is a viable tool for professional development.

**Action Research vs. Traditional Research Methods**

Like other forms of research, Action Research involves inquiry, systematic methodology and data collection followed by analysis and reflection; unlike traditional research methods, Action Research is employed by those who will be directly affected by the results, conducted in the field, in the researcher’s native environment, by a researcher who is trying to affect change not simply question why or how something is occurring (Sherman, Schmuck, & Schmuck, 2006). Action Researchers seek to answer specific questions related to specific students, classrooms, or schools while traditional researchers want a more generalized point of view.

These scholars argue that cutting edge research done by objective, “professional“ researchers in universities who have no experience with education or with children is in fact ineffective and of no use to educators working in the field (Ferrance, 2000). Action Research, on the other hand, is a methodology involving a pragmatic and immediate
solution to the problems arising in classrooms and schools using data that is analyzed by
and reflected on by those working directly in the field and whose results are immediately
acted upon by the practitioner themselves.

Another important benefit of Action Research is its meaningful employment as a
professional development strategy that takes into account the classroom needs of
individual teachers and allows them to work with, reflect on, and improve their own
specific educational conditions (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Kern & Levin, 2009;
Reeves, 2009). What school district administrators and classroom teachers consider
appropriate and purposeful professional development are two very different things.
Principals, program specialists and the like tend to focus on training teachers in the newly
adopted reading curriculum or provide refresher courses in techniques and strategies that
seasoned teachers have been using for years (Reeves, 2009). There is very little
opportunity for teachers to interact with one another, network with other teachers, and
share their thoughts and expertise with one another. After the trainings are completed,
teachers return to the isolation of their own classrooms and are left to either implement
what was “taught” or disregard it and carry on doing things they way they always have in
the past. It is for these reasons that teachers are generally unmotivated by these training
opportunities selected and provided by their district and are often left feeling that there
could have been a better use of their time. In his article “Model Teachers,” Reeves
(2009) polled 300 teachers and found that they were more influenced by their coworkers
than by any professional development provided by their school district and purports that
teachers would be more engaged with professional development and have more buy-in if
they were in control of their own professional development. Reeves continues stating that once the research is completed, teachers can share their findings with other teachers on their staff or in their grade level or who work with the sample population of students and the knowledge that they gained can influence those teachers as well.

**Benefits of Action Research**

The benefits of action research are many: to affect change in one’s practice; to improve student achievement; to provide professional development that educators can dedicate themselves to and value; to promote reflective practice and collaboration amongst individual teachers; and to improve communication between teachers and administrators (Ferrance, 2000; Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Reeves, 2009). In an age where accountability and research-based practice are constantly invoked, action research allows educators to take ownership of their own professional development by using systematic, data-driven practices that have a direct relation to their current students and teaching practices without having to wait for mandates from the school district referencing out-of-date “research” conducted by professionals who do not work directly in schools (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Mills, 2007).

**Criticism of Action Research**

Harold L. Hodgkinson (1957) argued that due to their lack of training in rigorous research techniques, teachers are unable to remain objective and will be less likely to report problems related to their research. In addition, Hodgkinson maintained that
because they are so heavily invested in the process, their analysis and reflection only focuses on the good to come out of the research they engage in. Ferrance (2000), though a strong supporter, reminds her readers that many critics of Action Research including argue that the methodology is unscientific because it is not carried out under highly controlled conditions such as in a lab, by researchers who are trained and committed to objective, data-driven investigation. However, she goes on to argue that the systematic, data-driven analyses Action Researchers utilize in their investigations counters this critique.

Importance of Parent Involvement in Schools

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government defined parent involvement as the active participation of parents in two-way communication about their child’s academic learning that allows parents to be full partners with school personnel and included in decision-making and serving on advisory committees as appropriate (No Child Left Behind, 2001). In other words, schools must look beyond the bake sale to develop more meaningful and engaging interactions with the parents and families of their students (Henderson et al., 2007).

The idea that parents are their child’s first teacher is not a new one (Berger, 1991; Chavkin, 2005). From birth, a mother teaches her child the important things they need to know to grow and flourish. As infants grow into toddlers, parents introduce books and toys to engage them, sing them familiar songs to make them smile, and schedule play dates with other toddlers so that they can learn important social skills like sharing and
turn-taking. When a toddler grows into a preschooler, parents begin teaching their child about the letters of the alphabet and color recognition. And when a preschooler enters school for the first time, what is taught in the classroom should be carried into the home so that it can be reinforced and generalized.

Extensive research by Joyce Epstein has shown that the more involved a parent is in their child’s education right from the beginning, the more dedicated the child becomes to education (Epstein, 1987, 2005, 2008; Epstein et al., 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Parent involvement is directly linked to student achievement and high school graduation rates because when a child sees that their parents value education the child learns to value it as well (Epstein, 2008).

Parent involvement has taken on many shapes in schools (Berger, 1991; Epstein et al., 2002). Parents can participate along a continuum of involvement ranging from passive to active participation; from believing in the work that schools do, to helping their child with their homework at night, to attending school functions like parent/teacher conferences or back to school nights, to volunteering their time to chaperone field trips or working directly in their child’s classroom (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1987).

Although all parents care about their child’s education, they are not sure how to show it. Not all parents are able to help their child with their homework because they work two jobs or because they do not speak English, while other parents do not want to volunteer their time at school because they themselves have negative feelings about teachers and schools due to their own difficulties growing up (Wherry, 2009; National PTA). It is these parents that schools need to make connections with by meeting them on
their own turf and shifting the balance of power from school to home (http://www.pthvp.org/).

In order to reach the families of all students, schools must employ a variety of techniques to foster parent involvement. Epstein et al. (2002) offers six different types of parent involvement that schools can foster: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein’s framework is widely cited in the literature on parent involvement. Table 1 will illustrate these types of parent involvement in more detail:

Table 1

Epstein’s Model for Parent Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with the Community</td>
<td>Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Cultural Implications for Parent Involvement

Non-English speaking students and families are among the most difficult for schools to develop a relationship with (Davis & Yang, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; National PTA; Wherry, 2009). This rift is often caused by the language and cultural barriers that exist between non-English speaking families and primarily English speaking school personnel (Valdez, Dowrick, & Maynard, 2007). Valdez, Dowrick & Maynard believe the clash between school and home has to do with the differing value systems held by each party and cite Dreeben (1968) when saying that schools value independence and achievement; skills that are in direct contrast with the values taught in the homes of some cultures where ideals of inter-dependence and cultural collective values are upheld.

While the student population in schools grows more and more diverse, the teacher population has stayed pretty much the same (Broussard, 2003; Lin & Bates, 2010; McHatton, 2007). Broussard (2003) and McHatton (2007) agree that the majority of
teachers are female, white, and of middle-class, European-descent, and their values and experiences differ greatly from the increasingly diverse students that they are teaching. Research has shown that teachers think and act in their classrooms based on the values and knowledge they acquired from the sum of their experiences growing up (Lin & Bates, 2010). When those values, knowledge and experiences differ from those held by their students, those students are at a disadvantage (Broussard, 2003). Teachers from white, middle-class backgrounds have difficulty connecting with diverse families (Chavkin, 2005; McHatton, 2007).

Because of their differing race and socio-economic backgrounds, many teachers are not knowledgeable about the culture and traditions of their students from other races and classes. When teachers are unfamiliar with or do not understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, they miss opportunities to celebrate those differences and make connections with families (Lin & Bates, 2010). When parents do not feel that their culture is respected or valued by their child’s school, they tend to shy away from interactions with school personnel (Broussard, 2003). Broussard cites Valdés (1996) who argues that many forms of parent involvement currently being utilized by schools are in fact culturally biased and keep diverse families from participating rather than encouraging them to be involved and that in fact, many parents from diverse backgrounds may not know how to interact with their child’s school.

Broussard (2003), Chavkin (2005) and McHatton (2007) all argue that teacher preparation programs must do more to educate teachers-in-training about the different cultures they will come into contact with in their classrooms and in addition, teach them
to value and respect those cultures by incorporating them into their daily teaching practices. Lin & Bates (2010) believe it is imperative that teachers understand the relationship between the students’ home culture and their school learning.

McHatton (2007) suggests that because of the continued existence of discrimination in the lives of ethnic minority single parents, “guiding teacher candidates through a reflective process in which they examine their own responses to specific experiences of discrimination would assist them in gaining a better understanding of their own biases and beliefs” (p. 246). This support for reflective process can be extrapolated to the practice of home visits and potential biases that may shape a teacher’s attitude toward the environment and individuals involved in a home visit. In engaging parents from diverse backgrounds, Varela (2008) states,

When parents encounter a school community that addresses the need of their children using teaching practices that take into account cultural and linguistic differences, they will, in turn, feel respected, appreciated, and cared for. Once this is accomplished, immigrant parents will make the effort to become vital members of the school community. (p. 60)

Mendez (2010) documents that parent involvement improves student readiness for education. When both educators and parents work together to establish connections there are improvements in student behavior and in social skills (Mendez, 2010; Mendez & Fogle, 2002).

Some teachers, despite an awareness of the importance of cultural difference on patterns of learning versus external markers of culture, focus primarily on external markers of culture in their teaching practice (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005).
Home Visiting as a Way of Connecting with All Families

One of the ways for teachers in the field to begin learning about the different cultural backgrounds of their students is through home visiting (Henderson et al., 2007; Lin & Bates, 2010). Home visits are an excellent opportunity for teachers to learn about their students’ diverse backgrounds first-hand while bridging the gap between school and home (Henderson et al., 2007; Lin & Bates, 2010).

Teachers who make home visits come to respect and value the differences that make each child unique (Traveras, 1998). Traveras quotes one teacher who, following home visits said,

We came away from our children’s home with respect and admiration for families doing the best they could, sometimes under dire circumstances. We began to view all children in our classes more compassionately and with greater understanding. Now we know that each child has a unique and special life. Our goal is to nourish the skills children do have and appreciate parents and encourage them to be an integrated part of their child’s education. (p. 3)

When they reflect on what they learned following a home visit, teachers begin to look for ways to incorporate and celebrate those differences in their daily practice (Henderson et al., 2007; Lin & Bates, 2010). When children see that their teachers value their cultural heritage, they perform better in class and their parents feel more comfortable coming to school activities and interacting with school personnel (Lin & Bates, 2010; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

For teachers, home visits are a great way of showing families that they care (Lin & Bates, 2010; Traveras, 1998) and by bringing any interventions needed directly to the home, teachers are making the educational experience a whole family activity (Sweet &
Appelbaum, 2004). At school, teachers only see one side of their students. When teachers visit the homes of their students, they see first-hand how students’ home lives effect their performance at school (Lin & Bates, 2010).

Despite the fact that research has shown home visits to be a viable way of engaging parents in their child’s education, resulting in improved parent involvement and student achievement, many districts and school are resistant to utilizing this methodology (Lin & Bates, 2010; Traveras, 1998). Lin & Bates as well as Traveras state that fears are one of the biggest things keeping teachers from making home visits. These fears include, but are not limited to: not knowing how a parent will react to a home visit, feeling like they are invading the family’s privacy, fearing they will be forced to make a call to CPS because of something observed in the home, safety concerns related to making visits in the evening in dangerous neighborhoods, and fear of becoming entangled in family problems. Other barriers to making home visits include time constraints as even districts that do support home visit models fail to provide teachers with release time; lack of compensation for time spent making home visits; and language barriers (http://www.pthvp.org/; Lin & Bates, 2010; Traveras, 1998).
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to create a handbook for the educators at Vineland Preschool that outlines the home visit model developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) and provides tools to assist those educators in carrying out home visits. This handbook will ideally be useful beyond Vineland Preschool for educators who have trepidation about engaging in the practice of home visits. These tools include strategies for making effective home visits, reducing the anxiety educators may feel, and encouraging them to step beyond their comfort zone, all in the name of building stronger relationships with the families of their students. The content of this handbook builds upon issues addressed during oral presentations of the two-visit home visit model developed by the PTHVP and expands a packet provided to participants in the home visit training. Despite the existence of these two tools it has been this researcher’s experience that educators need additional material to assuage their fears and to understand how best to employ the information gained from the practice of home visits.

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project’s Home Visit Model

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) was created in 1998 and is a partnership between a local Sacramento school district, a teachers’ union, and a faith-based community-organizing group. Their purpose was to build relationships between
schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District and the homes of children who were from low socio-economic backgrounds, English Language Learners, and/or were performing poorly in school (http://www.pthvp.org/). The members of the PTHVP developed a two-visit home visit model with the purpose of “ending the cycle of blame between families and school staff by building trust and respect, instilling cultural competency and increasing personal and professional capacity for all involved” (http://www.pthvp.org/).

The purpose of the first visit, usually made in the Fall, is to build relationships with families through active listening. Teachers take the time to get to know the families of their students by listening as the parents talk about their child, their family, and their goals. It is crucial that the teacher let the parents talk about themselves and about their children so that the visiting teacher can gain a better understanding of things from their perspective. Teachers leave this initial home visit feeling more connected to the families of their students and the families themselves feel that their child’s teacher really cares about them as people and values what they have to say.

The focus of the second visit, made in the Spring, is on assessment and tools that can support learning. It provides an opportunity for teachers to share information about a child’s academic achievement and some simple tools that families can utilize to help support their child’s education at home. Teachers can share test results with parents and point out one or two areas that the child could really make improvements in if they just had a little more practice. Then the teacher provides the parent with the tools to help their child practice those skills at home. Teachers take the time to show the parents
exactly how to use the tools that they are being given so that parents don’t feel that they have to figure it out for themselves. Knowing how to help their children will empower parents and give them confidence that they can support their child’s learning. During this second visit, it is important that teachers tell parents that they will continue to work on these skills at school and that by working together, the child will make gains more quickly and be better prepared for end-of-year assessments.

This home visit model has been used by the PTHVP for more than a decade and has proven to be highly successful (EMT Associates, 2004). Schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District utilizing this model have seen increased student attendance rates, increased student test scores, decreased suspension and expulsion rates, and decreased vandalism at their school sites (EMT Associates, 2004; http://www.pthvp.org/). As a result of the success of this model, the members of the PTHVP travel throughout the state and country training other school districts in the use of their two-visit home visit model.

Background of the Project

In 2005, members of the PTHVP made a presentation to the Rio Linda Union School District Board proposing that the district begin utilizing home visits as a way of building relationships with families. The school board adopted a resolution creating a district-wide home visit pilot program and the Superintendent asked for school principals to volunteer to pilot the program at their site.
During the 2005-06 school year this researcher had a unique opportunity as a staff member at a school site where the PTHVP’s home visit model was being piloted. The site administrator at Warren A. Allison Elementary School in the Rio Linda Union School District (RLUSD) attended a presentation on home visits to the members of the school board after which the district superintendent asked principals in attendance to pilot the program at their schools. Five elementary principals volunteered their schools because each had set goals for improving parent involvement at their site. After presenting the idea to her staff, the principal at Warren A. Allison Elementary School asked that any teachers interested in making home visits attend a training behind held by the PTHVP and begin making home visits. After making the initial Fall visits, teachers taking on this endeavor would be provided with a second training in early Spring about the purpose of the second visit. This researcher was interested in building stronger relationships with the families of her students and therefore was eager to volunteer to become one of the pilot classrooms at her school site.

The following school year 2006-07, the researcher was contacted by a district administrator in charge of the home visit pilot program. This administrator had heard from Warren A. Allison Elementary School’s principal about the researcher’s successful use of the home visit model developed by the PTHVP and along with teachers from four other school sites (one representing each school site piloting the home visit program) was forming a Home Visit Team to handle all staff development for other school sites around the district as they started their own home visit programs. In addition to her duties as one of the team responsible for training teachers at different school sites in the district, the
researcher also supported schools by helping them find funding to support their home visit programs once the pilot had come to an end.

The Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program Grant

As a result of her direct involvement with the PTHVP and as a member of the RLUSD’s Home Visit Team, this researcher collaborated with the principal at Warren A. Allison Elementary School to apply for a two year Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant.

The purpose of the Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program was to “strengthen communication between schools and parents as a means of improving pupil academic achievement” (http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/profile.asp?id=1011). Funding through the Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant was available to local education agencies K-12 that wanted to build connections with families through the use of home visits (K-4) or community meetings (6-12). The amount of funding available for a school depended on the student population: $15,000 for schools with 499 or fewer enrolled students; $20,000 for schools with 500-799 enrolled students; $30,000 for schools with 800-1499 enrolled students; $35,000 for schools with 1500 or more enrolled students (http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/profile.asp?id=1011).

In order to be eligible for the Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant, it was mandatory that 50% of the teachers employed at the school voluntarily agree to participate in the program by making periodic visits to the homes of their students or by attending community meetings that were held at times and locations convenient to
parents. It was also necessary to obtain the written support of 50% of the parents whose children attended the school. This was most often acquired by having parents sign Home/School compacts supporting the home visit program at their school site.

First Steps in the Home Visit Process

In order to garner support for the Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant from the staff members at Warren A. Allison Elementary School, the researcher engaged in many conversations with her coworkers, especially her grade level partners, about the effect home visits had had on her relationships with the families of her students and the improvements that she had seen in her students’ academic achievement as a result of more active parent involvement. Many teachers, particularly in the primary grades were very interested in the home visit model and the school received more than 50% voluntary participation from the staff members from across all grade levels K-6, including Special Education.

In alignment with the research on the value of parent involvement, the application for a Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant also stipulated that the school obtain support for the program from at least 50% of the parents of the students attending. In order to reach all of the families, the researcher developed a Home/School compact letter that was translated into Russian and Spanish (see Appendix A). The first wave of letters were distributed at Open House where the researcher and principal spoke briefly about the importance of developing positive relationships with families and the specific goals of the home visit program. It should be noted that the majority of the first signed
Home/School compact letters to be returned were from families where English was spoken in the home. The researcher was concerned that even though the letters had been translated into their native language, the Russian and Spanish speaking families were not eager to participate in the program. After speaking with the two interpreters who were familiar with these families, it was decided that personal calls would be made in order to talk about the purpose of the home visit program and invite families to participate. After the interpreters made these calls, the researcher noted an increase in the number of signed compacts that were returned by families who spoke a language other than English at home. Based on these results, it became clear that families who spoke a language other than English preferred more personal communication with the school even when literature was sent home in their native language.

Each classroom teacher sent a second wave of Home/School compacts home and the school received an encouraging 75% return on the signed Home/School compacts. The school’s Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant application was approved and $15,000 was provided to the school to support all staff members in carrying out home visits or hosting community meetings, depending on the grade level they taught.

With some of these funds, the researcher created a toolkit locker at her school in which teachers from all grade levels could find materials they could bring with them on their Spring home visits to give to the families of their students to support their education at home (see Appendix B). These tools were selected by teachers at each grade level and represented skill areas that students in those grades frequently struggled with.
Support for the home visit program at Warren A. Allison Elementary School was so widespread that by the second half of the first year of the program, teachers had made more than 200 visits. Sadly, there were still some teachers who were not making home visits. It is the researcher’s opinion that the teachers who did not participate felt that they were already doing enough to involve the families of their students and were not willing to give up their personal time after school to visit the homes of their students.

In addition to the resistant teachers at Warren A. Allison Elementary School, the researcher also encountered teachers at other school sites who had misconceptions and apprehensions about making home visits. Some teachers felt that home visits were only for students who were failing, were excessively truant, or who were being abused or neglected. They felt that the only people qualified to make home visits were administrators, truancy officers, and social workers. These teachers completely misunderstood the purpose of the home visit model being utilized at their school. Rather than scolding parents for not getting their kids to school or punishing them for mistreating their child, these home visits were intended to build a relationship with the families and show them that they were valued members of the team. Home visits empower parents to support their child’s education, resulting in higher academic success for that child.

There were also teachers who were wary of making home visits and were scared of what might happen if they visited the homes of their students. Some of these teachers insisted that it was essential to maintain a purely professional relationship with parents and that it was not a good idea to get personally involved with students. Others feared
that going to poorly lit neighborhoods in low socio-economic areas of town was dangerous. Still others feared how they would deal with issues that arose around family pets, eating food prepared in dirty kitchens, and communicating with families who did not speak English. While each of these concerns are addressed in the PTHVP’s introductory presentation of their home visit model, many teachers who attended this training still needed to talk further about these issues and go through scenarios to help them respond appropriately to such occurrences.

Lastly, the researcher interacted with many teachers who, despite being financially compensated, failed to truly embrace the home visit program because they said that they did not have the time. They expressed an unwillingness to engage in additional labor for their students that they considered relatively unproductive. Because these teachers were new to the idea of home visits and had not had the chance to see the improvements firsthand, they were not invested in the pilot program.

When the Rio Linda Union School District merged with three other local districts in 2008-09 to become the Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD), the Home Visit Team was disbanded and district financial support for the program dried up despite the documented success of the program. It is unclear how many, if any, teachers continued to make home visits after their school’s Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program grant was completed.
Description of School Population: Vineland Preschool

At the beginning of the 2008-09 school year the researcher was transferred to Vineland Preschool and Pathways Community Day School (CDS) in the TRUSD. Vineland/Pathways is a unique school campus housing five separate programs including district-run programs, county-run programs, and state-run programs.

Vineland Preschool is a district-run program consisting of five preschool classrooms for children with special needs. All children attending Vineland Preschool must be referred for special education services and evaluated for eligibility before they can be placed in one of the five preschool classes. Children who attend one of these programs are between the ages of three and five years old and have handicapping conditions including Autism (AU), Mental Retardation (MR), Visual Impairments (VI), Learning Disabilities (SLD), Communication Impairments (SDL), and Other Health Impairments (OHI). The preschool currently has an enrollment of 30.

All students at Vineland Preschool have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) written specifically to address needs arising from their disability. Two of the preschool classrooms serve children with autism spectrum disorders (AU), two serve children with Learning Handicaps (LH) and one serves children with Severe Handicaps (SH). The two AU programs as well as the SH program are supported by one teacher and two paraeducators while the two LH programs are supported by one teacher and one paraeducator. In the past, all five of the preschool programs have had a classroom maximum of 15 students divided between morning and afternoon programs. However, due to the removal of class size reduction, the school district has indicated that these
maximums no longer apply. Because the law states that the day a child with special needs turns three years old they are eligible to receive services supplied by the school district, Vineland Preschool’s enrollment is constantly changing. All five preschool classrooms are constantly receiving new students throughout the school year.

Vineland Preschool is the only school across the entire TRUSD that serves preschoolers with special needs in Special Day Class (SDC) programs. Therefore, the children attending Vineland Preschool often reside from far away and represent all of the different communities making up the TRUSD. All students attending the preschool are bussed to and from school daily, unless their parents have expressed the desire to transport them themselves.

Sixty percent of students attending Vineland Preschool are English Language learners as indicated by the Home Language Survey completed by parents upon enrollment in the program. Six different languages are represented: Spanish, Hmong, Vietnamese, English, Russian, and Punjabi. Title I status does not apply because Vineland is a preschool program; therefore, there are no available statistics related to socio-economic status of the student population.

The school day is divided into morning programs and afternoon programs. As a general rule, students who are four or five years old attend school Monday through Friday while children who are three years old attend school Monday through Thursday. The five preschool programs only operate for three hours in the morning on Fridays, leaving Friday afternoons free for teachers to collaborate and/or make home visits.
Because Vineland Preschool is a special education site, it relies on the district’s special education budget for monetary support. In California, attendance is not monitored at the preschool level and therefore the program does not receive any support from Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding. The preschool program also receives some money from MediCal funds generated by nurses and therapists across the district and teachers at Vineland Preschool are expected to take data and bill MediCal for health related services rendered each month.

The SDC preschool programs at Vineland are supported by two full time Speech and Language Pathologists, one part time Occupational Therapist, and one part time School Psychologist. There is also a Vision Therapist who visits the site weekly to support students with Visual Impairments. There is one nurse who is on site one day a week.

Home Visits at Vineland Preschool

Prior to the beginning of the researcher’s first year at Vineland Preschool, she made initial home visits to the families of her students much the same as she had at her previous school site. By the time the first day of school rolled around, the researcher had already met each of her students and made beginning connections with their families. When she asked her new colleagues if they made home visits, the researcher learned that home visits were built in to the program’s weekly schedule.

Vineland Preschool’s program is unique in the TRUSD. Students do not attend school on Friday afternoons so that teachers have the opportunity to make home visits
and collaborate with parents as well as other professionals who work in the home providing early intervention services. The expectation of the school and district administrators is that preschool teachers make visits to the homes of their students on a regular basis, but no training is provided to the staff about how to make home visits or about the purpose of making home visits. Two of the staff members have been working at Vineland Preschool for many years and are familiar with making home visits; however, as new teachers join the staff, they need information and support in order to make their home visits successful. New staff members, particularly educators new to the profession, can be very unsure about visiting the homes of their students; most especially when their students are living in rural or low-income areas. Teachers fear that visiting homes may be unsafe while others assume that parents would not accept a teacher visiting their home for fear of them making a report to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Despite the fact that time is allotted each week for home visits, very few staff members at Vineland are making these visits on a regular basis. When they do, their home visits are more about what children are doing at school and how they are scoring on assessments and making progress towards mastery of their IEP goals than about building relationships with the families. In addition, there continues to be a negative attitude towards parents who ask questions, parents who do not speak English, and parents who advocate for their children at IEP meetings and request more direct services.
The Researcher’s Classroom

This researcher currently works in one of the two preschool classrooms for children with ASD. She has two paraeducators supporting both the morning program as well as the afternoon program. Five students attend the morning program (one girl, four boys) and four students attend the afternoon program (four boys). Three students are Hispanic while the other six are Caucasian. There are no identified English Language Learners based on the parents’ responses on the Home Language Survey although Spanish is spoken in two of the students’ homes on a regular basis. If these preschool students were to eat breakfast and lunch at school, 100% of them would be eligible for free or reduced meals.

The researcher has been working at Vineland Preschool for children with ASD for the past three years. Prior to Vineland, this researcher taught LH Kindergarten students at Warren A. Allison Elementary School. She has also taught children with ASD in Texas as well as North Carolina and has a combined experience of 13 years of teaching children with special needs.

Both paraeducators supporting the researcher’s classroom have worked at Vineland Preschool longer than the researcher. One paraprofessional has worked at Vineland Preschool for six years while the other has worked there for four years. Both paraeducators are trained in various techniques specific to working with children on the autism spectrum including the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), discrete trial training (DTT), the TEACCH method, and positive behavior supports (PBS).
The researcher too is well versed in these methodologies and utilizes them to the fullest extent possible in the two and a half hours a day that her students attend school. Visual schedules and work systems are employed to help students understand what is expected of them, DTT is used to break down skills into minute increments to be taught one-on-one, PECS is used throughout the school day to give the students a way to communicate their needs and wants, and the entire classroom is organized and physically set up in adherence to the TEACCH model of structured teaching for children with ASD.

The Researcher’s Prior Experience with Home Visits

This research is derived from the researcher’s use of the PTHVP’s home visit model during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years while the researcher was a staff member at Warren A. Allison Elementary School. These personal experiences making successful home visits emphasized their value as a way of getting to know the families of her students in a more meaningful way and inviting each family to play a more active role in their child’s education.

Prior to joining the staff at Vineland Preschool, the researcher had several years of experience making visits to the homes of her students using the two-visit model developed by the PTHVP. As indicated previously, the two-visit model consists of an initial get-to-know-you visit made in the Fall followed by a second visit in early Spring that may involve discussion of the individual student’s academic progress and areas of difficulty. This two-visit model is consistent with the model used by the PTHVP in the
Sacramento City Unified School District for over ten years and that has proven to be successful at increasing the level of parent involvement and student achievement.

After attending an introductory workshop on what home visits were, how they could help foster personal relationships with families and as a result support children’s education, the researcher began making the initial relationship-building home visits.

Thinking About Assumptions

The purpose of the initial home visit is to get to know the families of one’s students and learn about the family’s plans for their child’s future. Much of the discussions during the training about how to make these first visits surrounded the topics of fears and assumptions. The PTHVP trainers felt it was vital to the success of the program that teachers have the opportunity to openly discuss any apprehensions they may have about making visits to the homes of their students. As a result of this conversation and the researcher’s reflections about her own assumptions about the families of her five students, the researcher developed a pre- and post- attitude scale (see Appendix C). These attitude scales were meant to provide the researcher with the opportunity to document her own assumptions about the families of her students in regards to their knowledge about their child’s disability, whether or not they were happy with the progress their child was making at school, their beliefs about the importance of education, whether or not they read to their child at night, whether or not they would like to be more involved in school activities, and whether or not they used positive reinforcement and consistent discipline with their child at home. The first attitude scale
Setting Up the Initial Home Visits

In their training, PTHVP suggested that these first home visits be made very early on in the school year so that the first contact from the teacher is positive. This researcher took that suggestion to heart and made all of the initial visits to the homes of her students prior to the first day of school. These initial visits were particularly powerful in that it was the first time the researcher had interacted with the parents on their own turf. In May of the previous school year, the researcher had met each family during a transition IEP meeting from preschool to kindergarten. It was at these IEP meetings that the researcher asked the parents if they would be willing to allow her to visit their homes in the weeks prior to the first day of school. Parents were very receptive to the idea of the researcher visiting their homes, if not a little surprised that a teacher would want to make such a visit. In late July and early August, the researcher began making her initial home visits.

Involving Other Colleagues

On many of the initial visits, the classroom’s paraprofessional also attended so that the family could get to know her as one of their child’s caregivers. Being able to participate in these home visits was just as important for the paraeducator as it was for the researcher. She was going to be working closely with the children on a daily basis and
her rapport with the children would be enhanced by having the opportunity to get to know their families better.

The participation of the paraeducator was mentioned to the parents when the initial phone call was made to set up the home visit. Whenever possible, it is important to notify the parents of any additional people who will attend the home visit so that they know up front who to expect and will not be caught off guard when there are more people at the door than just the child’s teacher.

Another strategy to involve colleagues is to go with a grade level partner. This allows the parent and child to get to know another teacher who they will likely be interacting with throughout the school year. Some teachers may be tempted to partner with a teacher from a different grade level who also has a student living in the same household. This doubling up is discouraged by the PTHVP as it takes away from the focus of each individual child’s unique needs.

When it was necessary, the researcher took an interpreter with her instead of her paraeducator or grade level partner so as not to overwhelm the parents with too many staff members. In their handout titled “Best Practices and Techniques for Successful Parent-Teacher Home Visits” the PTHVP suggests some important points for teachers to remember when using interpreters during home visits. If at all possible, teachers should spend time getting to know the interpreter’s individual style prior to making a visit with them and determining whether or not that style matches with what the teacher is trying to accomplish during the home visit. Some interpreters are very cautious to translate word-for-word what is being said during the visit. They do not interject their own dialogue into
the conversation. It should be remembered that the home visit is about building a
timeful relationship between the teacher and the family, not between the interpreter and the
family. It can be all too easy for interpreters and parents to slip into conversation about
other things unrelated to school because they share a similar heritage and are able to
converse in their native language. Teachers should be sure to talk with the interpreter
prior to the home visit to ensure that this does not occur. In addition, teachers should
always remember to look at the parent when they are speaking, even if they do not
understand what is being said. Using body language to show that you are listening is
very important to maintaining a connection to the family member that is speaking.

During her research, the author had the opportunity to utilize these practices while
making home visits with interpreters and found them to be very helpful.

The Process – The Call

Prior to the initial visit the teacher contacts the family and introduces herself. If
the family speaks a language other than English, the teacher should still call the parent to
first introduce him or herself before giving the phone to the interpreter to talk about the
purpose of the call. This demonstrates to the parents that even though you speak a
different language, you are interested in building a relationship with them.

Once you have introduced yourself, the teacher may also wish to discuss with the
family their purpose in making a home visit and emphasize that the visit is simply an
opportunity for them to get to know the family and the child; they do not need to clean
their home or prepare anything special for the teacher’s arrival. At this time, the teacher
should also inform the parent if they will be bringing another coworker with them to the visit and identify that person by name and describe their involvement with their child, if applicable. If the parent agrees to having the teacher(s) visit their home, the teacher then asks the parent for days and times that would suit their schedule. If the parent hesitates or is unsure about having the teacher(s) visit the home, the teacher can suggest a more neutral site such as a local coffee shop or park. A home visit does not necessarily have to take place at home, if the parent is not comfortable with that for whatever reason.

Visits should be conducted at school as an absolute last resort. Once the parent comes to the school, the power structure shifts and they no longer feel as if they are in charge of the visit. This is NOT what a teacher is trying to accomplish. The teacher should also keep in mind that if a parent declines to receive a home visit, they must accept the parent’s wishes and place no judgment on the family for declining to participate. They may choose to ask about a home visit at a later date as the school year progresses.

Once a date and time have been established, the teacher informs the parent that they will call a day prior to the visit to ensure that the date selected is still viable. The teacher should ask the parent if an interpreter is needed for the visit and make arrangements for one to go on the home visit if the parent requests it. It is also a good idea to verify the family’s address. Lastly, the teacher may also wish to mention any allergies or fears of animals that they may have so that the parent can be prepared to make adjustments prior to the teacher’s arrival on the day of the visit. Calling the day before the visit to remind the parent that you will be coming not only confirms the home
visit, but also gives them the opportunity to prepare for your arrival. Unlike visits made by truancy officers, social workers, or employees of Child Protective Services, the goal of the teacher making a home visit is NOT to surprise the parent and catch them doing something wrong. You are there to build a relationship with them.

The Day of the Home Visit

On the day of the visit the teacher should make sure they have correct directions to the family’s home either using a map or Global Positioning System (GPS). It is also a good idea to bring the family’s phone number in case of getting lost or running behind schedule as well as a list of the phone numbers and addresses of any other homes you may be visiting afterwards.

Prior to entering the home, all staff should take a moment to remember the purpose of the home visit and put aside any assumptions that they may have about the family and/or the child. Assumptions are things you THINK you know about the family based on their culture, race, socio-economic status, etc. There is no place for such biased ideas. Upon entering the home, the focus should be on listening to the family and showing them that they are an important and valued member of the child’s team. Form your opinion of the family based on the actual interactions you have with them rather than on your assumptions.
Breaking the Ice During a Home Visit

During the initial visit, the teacher spends time getting to know the family and the individual student. The support teacher, if in attendance, may also participate in the discussions, especially if they will also be working with the child, but they do not lead the conversation. Although teachers are not provided with a script to use during the visit and should treat each visit as unique as each family, teachers may wish to begin the conversation by re-stating the purpose of the visit and asking a few get-to-know-you questions. These questions may include but should not be limited to: “How long have you lived in the area?,” “Do you have any other children who attend our school?,” “What does your child like to do on the weekends or after school?”

This researcher chose to open the conversation by telling the family that she viewed them as their child’s first and most knowledgeable teacher and that she hoped to learn all that she could about the family and perhaps share a small bit of herself as well. At their trainings, the PTHVP members suggested asking the family what their hopes and dreams are for their child and then following the natural progression of the conversation based on their answer. As a teacher of very young children with special needs, the researcher cautions other teachers about asking this question. There are some parents who are not ready to answer this question because they are still learning to deal with their child’s diagnosis or health problems. It is important that the teacher be sensitive to the family and not bring up difficult topics that the family may not be ready to discuss with them just yet.
Because she was aware of the difficulty some of the families were still experiencing, this researcher chose to ask families less intrusive questions like “What does your child like to do on the weekends?” or “How does your family spend time after school or on the weekends?” These questions allowed the conversation to begin slowly and simply, giving the researcher and the family a chance to ease into the discussion before discussing more intense, and often times personal, topics.

Another way to break the ice during a visit is to bring something to the child and/or family and allow the conversation to begin around that item. For example, this researcher created refrigerator magnets that included school contact information, direct teacher contact information (phone and email), and transportation contact information (see Appendix D). The magnet, made in both English and Spanish, was given to the parent when the researcher first arrived at the home. For the children, the researcher prepared personalized tote bags for each student in her class (see Appendix E). Each tote bag had the child’s first name written clearly on the front of the bag. This provided the teacher with an informal yet simple way to assess whether or not the child recognized his/her first name. One of the first students the researcher visited asked “Es mio?” (“It’s mine?”) when he saw the tote bag.

Inside each bag were alphabet, number and shape magnets, flash cards, a writing tablet, crayons, pencils, scissors, glue, and stickers. These items proved to be very exciting for the children who enjoyed digging through the bag and exploring each item. This also provided the teacher and parent with an opportunity to talk while the child was actively engaged in an activity. It also provided the teacher with observational
information about whether or not the child could scribble, turn the pages of a book, recognize letters or numbers, use fine motor dexterity to put stickers on a paper, and use scissors.

At the end of the visit, the PTHVP members suggest that the teacher invite the family back to school for an upcoming event. Since the first visits the researcher made were done prior to the start of the school year, the parents were also given an invitation to Back to School Night (also provided in English or Spanish).

The Visitor’s Behavior During Home Visits

Many unexpected things can happen during a home visit. It is best for the teacher to not make judgments and be open to things that may be different or unfamiliar. You may be offered food that you have never tried. If you are uncomfortable with eating it, politely tell the family that you already ate and ask if you can take some home to try later. This request shows the family that you accept them rather than insulting them by saying, “I don’t eat that.” Remember, you are a guest in their home and use appropriate etiquette.

In the classroom, teachers expect their students to respect one another and teach them to value the importance of cultural differences. When you are visiting a home, use this as an opportunity to learn more about the cultural background of your students and suspend any judgments or assumptions that you may have so that you can actively observe what is happening. You can use these observations to help your work in the
classroom with the student. However, make sure that you do not actively take notes during the visit.

There is so much information to be learned during a home visit that teachers may be tempted to take notes. It is vital that one resist this temptation. Taking notes during a home visit will make the parents feel like they are being interviewed and scrutinized. Listening attentively and engaging in a two way conversation will put the parents at ease and show them that you are really listening, not just trying to collect information about them. The time for note taking is after the home visit has been completed and the teacher has left the home. If making multiple home visits on one day, the teacher can jot down notes in the car in between visits so they do not forget information that they feel is of particular importance. The only time a teacher should take notes during a home visit is to make note of something specific that the parent is requesting you get back to them about. Such notes should only be taken after the teacher has asked the parents’ permission to do so. Simply asking the parent if you could write yourself a reminder about the information they are asking for will show the parent that you respect them and want to be sure to answer their query as soon as possible.

Reflection Notes on Information Obtained During Home Visits

Following each visit, the researcher attempted to take notes on the form provided by the PTHVP in their handouts from the home visit training (see Appendix F). However, the researcher found the boxes too small and she could not fit all of the
information she had learned in the space provided. As a result, the researcher began carrying around a reflection journal in her car and detailed the home visits in that instead.

In the reflection journal, the researcher documented what topics were covered during the conversation as well as any information the parent had requested and that the researcher provide in the near future. As promised at the home visit, this information was provided within a few days of the visit – something that is vital for teachers to follow through with so that parents know the teacher was really listening to them and understood their needs and concerns.

Each of the initial home visits that were made provided the researcher with valuable information about her students and their families. In addition to seeing where they lived, learning the names of their family members, and finding out what they liked to do after school each day, the researcher learned what the families’ future hopes were for their child. This information gave the researcher an idea of where to start in providing an appropriate educational experience for each of her students so that she could always keep those interests, goals, hopes and dreams in mind when designing programs and IEP goals for her students. In addition, each home visit provided the researcher with the opportunity to see her students in a different setting and observe some of the skills they had or were lacking in that environment. This information prompted the researcher to create several post-home visit reflection forms that would help her organize her observations that had previously been recorded in the reflection journal (see Appendix G). These reflection forms would eventually become part of the handbook the author created as a culmination of this classroom action research project.
Other Potential Information Gained from Home Visits

Information gained during a home visit may come from the child inviting you to see their bedroom, from toys lying around the room or other special possessions. Because many of the researcher’s students are non-verbal, she does not have the opportunity to talk with them about their favorite things and what they like to do after school or on the weekends, but by visiting their homes, chatting with their families, seeing their bedrooms, watching them play with toys on the living room floor, the researcher learned valuable information that she was able to use in the classroom to engage students in literacy activities, as rewards for completed work and good behavior, practice social skills and peer interactions, as well as academic activities.

It is important for teachers to realize that they can learn about the abilities of their students at home and that just because the child cannot do something at school, does not mean that they cannot do it at home. Especially when dealing with children with special needs, skills may not be generalized from one setting to another. This particular home visits made by the researcher indicates that skills observed in a home visit, which may be different from the skills observable in the classroom environment, can catalyze the possibility of new teaching techniques and modes of engagement with students. For example, in the case of this little girl, when the researcher started positioning her closer to the teacher in a more contained space, not using a high chair, but seating that helped her to feel more secure, the student responded by being more focused and willing to attend to tabletop tasks.
In addition, if a student is able to accomplish something in one environment but not in the other (school vs. home, home vs. school), the teacher should consider why this skill is not being generalized and what they can do to make conditions in both environments similar enough that the child is able to perform the task in both places. For example, during a home visit with one of her students, the researcher learned that the child was independently initiating the use of the toilet at home yet at school he was frequently soiling his diaper and was not using the toilet to urinate. If the researcher had not seen her student go to the bathroom and use the toilet independently herself, she never would have believed it! But because she had made a visit to the child’s home, she had the opportunity to see her student perform a skill independently that she had been working on at school with little success. As a result of this visit, the researcher made adjustments to her classroom and provided the student with free access to the bathroom in hopes of encouraging the generalization of the skill of independent toileting.

The Researcher’s Reactions to the Initial Home Visits

The researcher was very nervous about making these initial visits. She often felt unsure around parents and feared stepping on their toes and doing something with their child that they did not approve of. There were even some parents that the researcher was intimidated by and uncomfortable around. Prior to making home visits, the researcher often felt timid and unsure of herself around the parents of her students. When parents were in her classroom, she worried that they were scrutinizing her and judging her abilities as an educator. When parents called to ask questions about why their child came
home with a skinned knee, the researcher often felt defensive as if the parent were
accusing her of unsafe practices.

Once this researcher began making visits to the families of her students and spent
time talking with them and getting to know them on a more personal basis, she felt more
comfortable and confident in her interactions with families. She also felt surer that their
parents supported the educational choices she was making in the classroom for her
students. When parents entered her classroom, the researcher stopped what she was
doing and welcomed them cheerfully; when parents telephoned the school and asked
questions about their child’s day, she thanked them for being involved in their child’s
education and taking the time to ask. The researcher was happy to find that making home
visits changed all of the feelings of apprehension and fear that she had previously felt.

Family Participation

Each family welcomed the researcher into their home in their own way. Some
families were very laid back and allowed their children to play in the same room that the
visit was conducted in. Other families took a more formal approach to the visit and had
cleaned their homes especially in preparation for their child’s teacher’s visit. Many
families even prepared a special meal for the researcher. One parent in particular said
proudly to the researcher, “I made my favorite food from my country for you to try”.

The children themselves were also thrilled to have visitors. When the researcher
arrived with the tote bag decorated with the child’s name, they reached out for the
researcher in excitement. They sat on the floor in front of the researcher, unpacking each
item and showing it to their parents and/or their siblings. Parents felt comfortable chatting about their child’s after school activities, weekend trips, and favorite pastimes. The researcher used family pictures on the wall as conversation starters to find out more about the child’s family and where they originated from, if it was somewhere different from California, and she used the techniques of active listening to show the families that she was listening to what they were saying and that it was important to her. Many of the families were interested to learn that the researcher herself was not a citizen of the United States and had emigrated from Canada. This gave them some common ground with the researcher and helped to build camaraderie and trust.

During the initial visit, some parents may be tempted to question the lead teacher about their child’s academic progress or classroom expectations. The PTHVP suggested that if such questions are raised, teachers should restate the purpose of the visit and invite the parent to come to the school for a conference to discuss their questions or concerns. But if the parent insisted, the teacher should provide them with some information so that they do not feel that their concerns are not being recognized. Since the visits this researcher made occurred prior to the start of the school year, parent questions were generally restricted to transportation concerns, toileting issues, and what supplies the child would need for school. These questions were answered and the parents were told that they would receive more detailed information at Back to School Night.
Details of a Successful Outcome

During one particular visit, the researcher was at the home of a student she had had in her classroom for six months. The child was completely non-verbal, did not interact with adults or peers, and wandered around the classroom flitting from one thing to another, rarely focusing on something for more than a minute. During 1:1 time with the teacher, this student frequently got out of her seat, seemingly in an attempt to avoid the work. The student was sitting in a high chair at the family dinner table. The researcher was talking with the family while the little girl ate. When she finished eating, the researcher handed her a book that was on the floor under the high chair. The researcher knew that the little girl liked books. As the researcher continued to talk with the family, the little girl started slowly turning the pages of the book and glancing at pictures. She used her index finger to point to pictures; something the researcher had never seen her do before. When the researcher noticed what she was doing, the little girl looked up intently at her teacher, waiting. When the researcher labeled the picture, the little girl smiled and pointed to another picture. This interaction continued for several minutes becoming more and more social. Eventually, the little girl was watching her teacher’s mouth as she labeled each picture, trying to make her mouth move in the same way. There were a few times when she was able to imitate the label her teacher had provided for the picture she was pointing to. The little girl’s mother came over and sat beside her daughter as well and her daughter incorporated her into the game almost immediately. When she wanted her mother to label the picture, the little girl pointed to the picture and then turned her head, gazing at her mother. When she wanted her teacher
to label the picture, she pointed to the picture and then turned her head and gazed at the researcher. Each time the label was provided to her, the little girl smiled and giggled with delight.

What was the most amazing about this interaction was the fact that this researcher, the child’s teacher, had never seen her student spend more than a minute focusing on one thing, yet here she was, playing a turn-taking game with two people that lasted at least ten minutes! Participating in this activity with her student prompted the researcher to consider whether or not her student needed to be more contained during activities at the table, not in an attempt to restrain her, but in an attempt to replicate the security she felt sitting in her highchair at home. Once the researcher realized that this might help her student, she provided the student with a booster seat in a chair in the classroom that imitated the feel of a highchair. The little girl now engages in tabletop activities more frequently and for longer durations of time thus increasing her learning opportunities while at school.

The Hopes and Dreams Question

In addition to getting to know the families during these initial home visits, the researcher had the opportunity to ask a few of the families what their hopes and dreams were for their child. Many parents were stumped by this question and sat quietly for a moment, thinking. Several parents stated that they had never been asked that question before and were not sure how to answer. Others shared that they had always been so focused on the here and now that they never really took the time to think about the future.
Still others cried quietly as they shared their vision of their child’s future with the researcher. One mother said, “I want my daughter to grow up and be happy. Nothing else, just happy.”

Children’s Reaction to Home Visits

On the first day of school, the students entered the classroom already knowing their teacher. Because of the visits she had made to their homes, the children already had some connection to the researcher and an understanding that their parents were working with their teacher to help them in their education. This is one of the most important tenets of the PTHVP’s home visit model and of parent involvement as a whole. When children see that their parents and teachers are united and are working together to support one another and them, they begin to realize that they have a network of support around them that will help them through adversity and cheer them on their successes.

After the first home visits were made, the students in the researcher’s classroom began to talk about their teacher visiting their home. This caused a buzz among the other students who joined the class later on and they too began asking if the teacher would be visiting their homes. Every family that was interested in receiving a home visit got one.

The Second Visit

The second set of home visits the researcher made occurred during the Spring, just prior to the end of the second trimester. The purpose of the second visit is to provide parents with ways that they can support their child’s learning at school while at home.
The PTHVP suggests that teachers bring toolkits with them that focus on one or two skills that the student needs to improve on. Prior to making these visits, the researcher asked the parents of her students what they would like to work on at home with their child. She knew that by involving the parents in the decision making process, she would more fully engage them in their child’s education.

Parents were eager to ask for tools to support communication, structuring free time, toileting, and skill practice. The researcher prepared these materials, based on what the child was currently using in the classroom, and brought them with her on each home visit. Time with the families during these second visits was spent talking about the purpose of the tools that were being provided and how to use them effectively the way they were used at school. These conversations were especially important in order to ensure consistency between home and school and so as to not confuse the children with different procedures in different environments; something that is particularly important for children with autism spectrum disorders.

As a result of using the toolkits that were provided to them at the second home visit, parents reported improved behavior in their children while at home, an increase in their child’s ability to communicate through the use of augmentative communication, and an increase in their adapted living skills such as enjoying leisure activities and completing hygiene routines more independently.

In the classroom, the researcher also found that her students were generalizing skills more quickly and were able to move on to new skills at a faster rate because they were practicing these skills at home as well as at school. IEP goals were being mastered
earlier in the year and children were making more academic progress, making the general education curriculum more accessible to them.

Results of Making Home Visits

As a result of implementing the two-visit home visit model developed by the PTHVP, this researcher saw an improvement in her students’ academic progress, an increase in their ability to communicate their needs and wants, and a connectedness to the families of her students that she had not experienced before. On a more personal note, the researcher felt more confident in herself as an educator and more comfortable interacting directly with the families of her students.

In addition, the researcher discovered that parents seemed more at ease with her as their child’s teacher. They started communicating with the researcher more often; some parents emailed or called, while others more frequently wrote in the daily home/school journal that was sent in their child’s backpack. Lastly, parents wanted to know how they could better support their child’s education at home and wanted to know more about the techniques the researcher used in the classroom that could be just as easily implemented in the home. As a result of increased parent involvement, this researcher’s students received more consistent interventions between school and home and the children began to generalize skills more quickly, mastering their IEP goals earlier in the year.

The researcher was very pleased with the success her utilization of home visits had in helping her to build partnerships with the families of her students and she planned
to continue making visits to the homes of her incoming Kindergarten students the following school year.

Development of Classroom Action Research Project

When the researcher recognized the need for more professional development around making home visits as part of the teachers’ weekly duties at Vineland Preschool, this Classroom Action Research project was developed. The researcher’s Classroom Action Research question was, “How can I support other teachers in making home visits and building relationships with the families of their students?”

In order to help the researcher answer this question, she relied on her previous experience making home visits and training other teachers in how to make home visits effectively. She also reflected on the many conversations she had had with colleagues that had chosen not to make home visits due to assumptions they had about families, fears they had related to visiting the homes of their students, and a general ignorance of how home visits could help them not only build stronger relationships with the families of their students but also improve student achievement. The researcher drew upon her experience as a trainer of other teachers in the use of the PTHVP model as well as the strategies and tools she had developed as a result of her own home visits.

PowerPoint Presentation and Teacher Training

The researcher developed a PowerPoint presentation for a two-hour Home Visit training presented to newly credentialed Special Education Teachers at California State
University, Sacramento (see Appendix H). All 23 participants in this training were completing their Level 2 Education Specialist Credential. Among the participants included teachers who were credentialed in the areas of Mild/Moderate Disabilities, Moderate/Severe Disabilities, Early Childhood Special Education, and Secondary Special Education. Some of the teachers participating in the training were experienced teachers returning for a second or third credential while others were relatively new to the field. Only a few of the participants stated that they had experience making home visits.

To open the presentation, the researcher read a story to the participants titled, “If She Only Knew Me,” written by Jeff Gray and Heather Thomas (2005) (see Appendix I). It is a powerful story told from the perspective of a little boy who faces many obstacles at home including taking care of his little brother, going to bed without supper, and dealing with abandonment by his father. The little boy also shares his thoughts on how much more enjoyable school would be if his teacher only knew that he liked to build rockets, draw, and run. While the researcher read the story aloud, her co-presenter, a parent, showed the book’s photographs on the overhead so that all participants could see them. For the researcher, this story illustrates what home visits are all about – getting to know students and their families on a more personal note in order to improve motivation and achievement at school. This story is a fitting introduction to any training about the use of Home Visits and was frequently used by the members of the Rio Linda Union School District Home Visit Team.

Once the PowerPoint presentation got underway, the presenter provided the participants with a short handout (see Appendix J) consisting of a sample phone script, a
Follow up sheet where teachers could make notes following a home visit, and a graphic that could be used during a second home visit to illustrate to parents where their child’s performance lay in regards to meeting standards. Each of these items were developed by the PTHVP and are frequently used in their handout provided during their training on their home visit model. Although this researcher had never used the third item during one of her own home visits, she felt it was important to provide to the participants of this particular training as many of them worked with students who were taking part in California standardized testing and may find this tool to be useful.

The PowerPoint itself included discussions of typical forms of parent involvement, other types of home visits including those made by Child Protective Services and truancy officers, and the benefits of making home visits using the model developed by the PTHVP. Discussing these topics is important to illustrate to participants how this particular home visit model differs from other types of parent involvement as well as from home visits made by other agencies.

Following the introductory dialogue, a parent of three children in the RLUSD who is also a member of the district’s Home Visit Team shared her experiences of receiving home visits. As a result of her children’s teachers visiting her home, this parent felt more empowered to advocate for the needs of her children (two of whom have special needs) and saw that the relationship her children had to those teachers became stronger. Because she was so enamored with home visits, the parent stated, she began training teachers how to make home visits in order to build relationships with the families
of their students. She now travels across the country with the PTHVP to share her message.

Once the participants had heard how home visits could benefit both teachers and parents, discussions focused on detailing the two-visit home visit model developed by the PTHVP, describing where home visits could take place, sharing ideas for breaking the ice by asking simple questions that will help teachers get to know families better, and providing detailed information about making the calls to set up home visits. It is important to take time during a training on the use of home visits to cover these topics in some detail so that participants have time to share their own ideas. Ideally, it would also be good to allow the participants to role play the call with other members of the group to practice what they would say to a parent during a call to set up a home visit, but there was insufficient time during this training to do such practice.

After the initial presentation of structure, the researcher moved on to a discussion of the barriers that might prevent both teachers and parents from choosing to take part in home visits. These barriers may include language differences, cultural differences, assumptions about the other party, and fears about making home visits. The researcher spent the majority of her time covering these barriers, as they are often the reasons why schools fail to build connections with the families of harder-to-reach students, including children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

The researcher lead the participants in a discussion of assumptions by sharing her own. For example, prior to making home visits, the researcher assumed that children
who misbehaved at school likely did so because they had no structure or discipline at home. After she began visiting the homes of her students, the researcher saw first hand that the parents were doing the best that they could to discipline their children, but they needed support and tools to help them. After providing these tools to the parents and showing them how to use them at home with their child, the researcher noticed a marked difference in the behavior of her students at school.

The parent who participated in this training also shared her assumptions of the teachers of her children prior to getting to know them better during home visits. Before receiving home visits, the parent suspected that teachers did not really care about the individual needs of her children and were only interested in getting through the day as easily as possible. But once those teachers started visiting her home, she discovered that they were dedicated professionals who truly cared about her children and who cherished them as unique individuals. One of those teachers even started taking her child to the movies and the skating rink on weekends, exposing him to experiences that he had not had the opportunity to enjoy previously. The parent shared that as a result of these positive interactions with their teachers, her children become more motivated about school and their self-esteem and confidence improved.

Training participants also had the opportunity to share their assumptions and fears related to making home visits. Like other trainings the researcher had participated in, these teachers voiced their concerns about offending families of different cultures, visiting dangerous neighborhoods, and seeing something in the home that would trigger a report to CPS. The researcher provided information about ensuring their safety while
making home visits as well as other tips for making home visits successful, including
getting-to-know-you questions, talking about home and school expectations, asking the
hopes and dreams question, and providing tools to empower parents to support their
child’s education at home.

The presentation concluded with the researcher providing ideas for welcome kits
and tool kits, sources of support for purchasing materials, and a challenge to the teachers
to go out and start making visits to the homes of their students. The researcher felt it was.especially important to provide participants with resource ideas. Often this is a barrier to
making home visits in its own right as teachers do not know how to access funds to
purchase materials or supplies to make tools for parents to use at home with their
children.

Following the presentation, the researcher asked the training participants to
complete a simple evaluation to provide her with their comments and thoughts about the
presentation and home visits in general (see Appendix K). The comments overall were
very positive with particular emphasis on the impact of having a parent present to share
her experiences with home visits. Comments about the parent’s involvement included, “I
greatly enjoyed the personal experience from a parent,” and “parent’s perspective was
insightful and moving.”

Participants also commented on the usefulness of being provided with tools to
help them make calls to parents, keeping track of information obtained during the home
visit, and spending time talking about barriers to home visits including assumptions and
fears. Suggestions included making the slides more concise and pacing of the
information provided, talking more about how to use home visits with high school students, and requesting tools for taking the information learned during a home visit and incorporating it into the classroom.

The researcher was pleased with the feedback she received from the participants of this home visit training and kept all of their comments in mind when she began developing a handbook to be used by the teachers at her school site.

Development of Handbook for Vineland Preschool Staff

Throughout this Classroom Action Research project, this researcher wanted to find ways of helping other teachers build stronger relationships with the families of their own students using the home visit model developed by the PTHVP. The researcher started slowly by sharing her experiences with her grade level colleagues and inviting them to come along on a home visit. She also offered to go with them on visits to the homes of their own students. She reached out to other teachers at other school sites in training sessions she participated in as a presenter and shared her experiences making home visits. After talking with many teachers, including the staff at her school site that asked for more information about home visits, the researcher decided to develop a handbook filled with materials and tools that teachers could utilize (see Appendix L). These materials would include all of the topics covered in the PowerPoint presentation and subsequent home visit training but in an expanded format that teachers could use over and over again to reflect upon their own assumptions and fears, refer to when contacting parents to set up home visits, document and organize the information they
learned during home visits, and change classroom practices for the better as a result of what they learned on a home visit.

During a staff meeting early on in the school year, the researcher talked about her Classroom Action Research project and shared with her colleagues some of the visits she had recently made. The researcher also told them about her experiences as a home visit trainer in the RLUSD as well as her presentation at CSUS and her desire to develop more materials to assist teachers in making home visits. Her colleagues expressed an interest in her use of home visits and asked if she was willing to share her materials with them. They felt that a handbook would be a valuable tool that they would be eager to put to use while making the home visits required of them as teachers at Vineland Preschool.

The researcher approached the development of the handbook in much the same way she did when creating the PowerPoint presentation for the participants of the home visit training she gave at CSUS. The researcher kept in mind the comments made by the participants in regards to keeping the information concise, the importance of spending time discussing barriers like fears and assumptions, providing useable tools such as scripts and organizers, and having a parent voice their experiences of home visits.

The foreword to the handbook is written by the parent who participated in the home visit training at CSUS and details her experiences with home visits and her feelings about the need for teachers to be trained prior to making home visits. This foreword provides teachers using the handbook with an opportunity to read firsthand how a parent views home visits and how important those visits were to empowering her as a parent and encouraging her children’s success at school.
Following the Foreword, the handbook takes the teacher through a definition of home visits, a discussion of the benefits of making home visits, traditional types of parent involvement and why they fail, and a description of the two-visit home visit model developed by the PTHVP. The handbook also suggests possible topics covered during a third visit specifically because the teachers at Vineland Preschool have every Friday afternoon available to make home visits and may have the opportunity to make more than two visits to students’ homes.

A large section of the handbook is dedicated to addressing fears that teachers may have about making home visits. During many of the trainings the researcher participated in, the majority of the barriers that teachers expressed were related to their own fears about safety, offending families of different cultures, as well as the assumption that parents who do not come to events held at school do so because they do not want to be involved in their child’s education. Because these barriers may keep teachers from fully embracing home visits, it is vital that the handbook addresses these topics and allows space for the teachers to write down their own fears and assumptions in order to reflect upon them often. Also included in the handbook is an updated version of the pre and post home visit attitude scales this researcher used during her initial home visits. The researcher found these to be very helpful in addressing her assumptions about the families of her students in relation to their knowledge about their child’s disability, their satisfaction with their child’s progress at school, the parents’ attitude about the importance of school, as well as their desire to be more involved in their child’s
education. These attitude scales provide a reminder to teachers to constantly be vigilant about the assumptions that they may be making about the families of their students.

Other useful tools found in the handbook include sample scripts for phone calls for setting up the first and second home visits, tips for working with interpreters, conversation starters for both visits, and a discussion of active listening techniques. The researcher felt it important to include these items so that teachers had the opportunity to prepare themselves more fully prior to beginning to make visits to the homes of their students by spending time getting to know the style of translation their interpreters were using, having ideas in mind for making conversation with families, and reminding them to listen actively as parents talked about their children.

Because the staff at Vineland Preschool work with children with special needs, it was also important to spend some time talking about the hopes and dreams question the PTHVP suggests teachers ask families. As discussed previously, many parents of young children with special needs are not ready for this question and therefore teachers should be cautious when considering asking it during a home visit.

Following the hopes and dreams question, the handbook focuses on ideas for creating welcome kits for the first home visit done at the beginning of the school year and tool kits for parents provided at the end of the school year during a second or third home visit. During trainings in the home visit model, many teachers commented that having these ideas provided to them was very helpful so the researcher chose to include them in the handbook. The researcher also provided a list of organizations and other sources
where teachers could possibly find funds to support the creation of welcome kits and tool kits.

The researcher adapted the school information magnets that she provided families during her initial home visits so they reflected Vineland Preschool’s information. These were included in the handbook in both English and Spanish to reflect the majority of the families whose children attend the preschool. The researcher also developed reflection forms that teachers can use to document and organize the information they learned while making a home visit and provide a place for teachers to jot down ideas for utilizing that information in their classrooms to provide better educational services to their students.

Lastly, the handbook provides details about other ways teachers can support parent involvement and where they can learn more about the topic, should they be inclined to do so.

Creating this handbook allowed this researcher to document in narrative form the effectiveness of home visits on the improvement of classroom instruction. This form of anecdote recounting best practices and successful strategies is designed to support colleagues by providing potential models for thinking about the home visit, formulation of effective questions, paying attention to crucial elements of the interaction that can foster better teaching, and constantly reminding the researcher and her colleagues that each home visit is a unique experience, just as each child is unique. This is especially important for a special education population: just as children with special needs are treated as individuals at school with an educational program specifically designed to meet their needs, so too should home visits made to the families of children with special needs.
One might easily say every home visit is about reminding the teacher of the uniqueness of the student and their support system.
Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Classroom Action Research is a valuable research method for teachers wishing to investigate a question related to their students or their daily practice. When teachers are able to actively engage in such research, they are not only more engaged in professional development activities, they also become more reflective practitioners. Through a systematic process of data collection and analysis, teachers using Classroom Action Research can become more connected to their students and gain a better understanding of the needs of those students. In addition, teachers using Classroom Action Research can share their research findings with coworkers and other educators who may have similar teaching situations.

This research employed the Classroom Action Research process as a means of investigating parent involvement, specifically home visits. The current trend in education is to actively engage parents in their child’s education through meaningful communication between the school and home. The use of home visits is a method that has proven to be effective in not only creating trusting relationships between the home and school environments, but also in empowering parents to become more active participants in their child’s education. The result of more active parent involvement is improved attendance rates, decreased problematic behaviors in school, and increased academic success.
The researcher made visits to the homes of her students following the guidelines created by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento, CA. After moving to a new school site, Vineland Preschool in the Twin Rivers Unified School District, the researcher recognized a need for further professional development in the usage of home visits as a way of building relationships with families. The researcher developed the research question, “How can I support other teachers in making home visits and building relationships with the families of their students?” Out of this research question, the researcher developed a PowerPoint presentation used during a home visit training at California State University, Sacramento and a handbook for use by the preschool special education teachers at Vineland Preschool who as a part of their weekly duties, were expected to make frequent visits to the homes of their students.

The handbook is an organized collection of information about home visits. It includes their purpose and the benefits to teachers and parents as well as a discussion of the barriers, fears and assumptions that may prevent both teachers and parents from participating in home visits. The handbook also describes various tools that teachers can utilize to set up home visits, use during home visits, and organize information gained during home visits for use in enhancing daily classroom practices. The materials included in the handbook were derived from comments made by participants in various trainings that the researcher facilitated both while she was a member of the Rio Linda Union School District Home Visit Team and after that time.
Conclusions

In the course of her research, the researcher made the following discoveries:

1) Despite the fact that teachers were being compensated for the time spent making home visits, many failed to buy-in to the program because they did not believe that it was an effective use of their time. It had previously been assumed that one of the barriers to making home visits would be the lack of compensation; however, this did not turn out to be as important as the researcher suspected. Based on this researcher’s experience, one of the best ways to get teacher buy-in is through parent testimony. As evidenced by the stories shared by the parent during the Home Visit training at California State University, Sacramento, many teachers who had never considered making home visits previously, changed their minds once they heard a parent’s perspective on the power of home visits.

2) Many teachers let their fears and assumptions prevent them from going on a home visit. These teachers were afraid of going to dangerous neighborhoods alone, of offending families whose culture was different from their own, and that they might see something while visiting a home that would trigger their status as a mandated reporter to Child Protective Services. For these reasons, any training provided to teachers about home visits must include a large portion of time spent discussing these fears, debunking assumptions, talking about culture differences, and providing teachers with useful safety tips to ensure their protection when making home visits.

3) Even teachers who were making home visits as part of their weekly duties were not necessarily doing them in a way that developed a relationship with families. In order to develop positive, two-way communication between schools and families, it is essential
that teachers take the time to really listen to parents when they are visiting their home. Home Visits are an opportunity for teachers to learn from the experts (the parents) firsthand about the child they are both trying to support. When teachers take the time to get to know their students, they learn why each child and their family are unique. This uniqueness should be celebrated in the classroom and teachers have the opportunity to use the strengths of each family to support learning at school. For example, if a particular family is knowledgeable about agriculture, the teacher could invite the parent to school to help the children plant a garden outside. Teacher can use the knowledge of families to enhance their daily practices and celebrate the uniqueness of each of their students at the same time.

4) Making home visits can help change a teacher’s attitude and assumptions about the families of their students and foster a positive relationship with those families where both teacher and parent are equal partners in furthering a child’s education. This positive relationship is characterized by two-way communication, mutual respect, and collaboration between schools and families and results in improved academic achievement in the classroom, empowerment for parents, and motivation for students. This researcher saw an improvement in the attitude and assumptions she had about the families of the majority of homes she visited as indicated by four of the five pre and post home visit attitude scales in Appendix C. It should be noted that the reason there was no change in the pre and post home visit attitude scale for the fifth family was because the home visit took place at an afterschool childcare facility and the parent did not attend. For this reason, the home visit did nothing to change the researcher’s attitude about the
parent. Teachers should also be mindful of their biases and assumptions about families from socio-economic backgrounds or cultures different from their own and instead embrace those differences that make each of their students special and unique.

5) When approaching parents about home visits, teachers should do so in a personal way, especially when trying to involve parents from differing cultural backgrounds or who speak a language other than English. For example, when being contacted about their possible participation in the home visit program at Warren A. Allison Elementary School, non-English speaking families preferred to be contacted personally so that they could have their questions related to the purpose and goal of the program addressed prior to giving their consent. These parents were pleasantly surprised that their child’s teacher would take the time to visit their home and were more than willing to give their support of the program once they understood its purpose.

6) Parents became more actively involved in their child’s education once they understood how to get involved and what the teacher wanted them to do. All parents want to be a part of their child’s education but many of them, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds or who speak a language other than English may not necessarily know the school’s expectations nor how they can meet those expectations at home. Once teachers made home visits, parents started to feel more empowered. They were better able to advocate for their child’s needs at school and more prepared to support their child’s learning at home.

7) Despite the research demonstrating that home visits are an exceptional way to involve the families of all students and break the cultural barriers that so often keep schools and
families apart, combined with federal guidelines mandating schools to seek meaningful ways of building communication with parents, the first thing to get cut in a school district is funding for home visits when the budget gets tight. This is an unfortunate fact in the Twin Rivers Unified School District and no doubt in districts across the state of California, if not the country and sends a very poor message to the parents and to the teachers who gave their support for the home visit program at seven district schools and put countless hours into building stronger connections to one another.

Recommendations

As a result of this research, the researcher has the following recommendations:

1) Teachers should have more opportunity to take charge of their own professional development through participation in research that is directly related to their daily practice instead of being forced to attend training developed by or sponsored by the school district. When the teacher is unable to select which professional development opportunities would benefit them the most given their current teaching situation, they are less likely to be invested in that professional development and when they return to their classrooms, little or no change will occur in their daily teaching practices.

2) Classroom Action Research should be encouraged amongst staff members as a way of engaging in meaningful, reflective practice that can be shared amongst coworkers and replicated by any teacher wishing to do so in order to improve their own professional practice. CAR can be utilized by individual teachers, grade level partners, school leadership committees, or by district administrators.
3) With a federally mandated focus on parent involvement in education, research has shown that home visits are an effective way of building communication between school and home. Therefore, home visit training should be a part of every teacher preparation program in the United States. Starting the conversation about home visits early on in a teacher’s career will give them more opportunities to discuss their fears about making visits to the homes of their students and give them a research-based practice that they can easily employ to improve the level of parent involvement in their students’ educations.

4) In school districts where home visits are being utilized, teachers should be compensated for their time spent making these visits and financially reimbursed for money spent making welcome kits and tool kits to bring with them on home visits. If it is not possible to pay teachers for their time due to budget constraints, then school and district administrators should build time for making home visits into school programs so that visits can be made during the work day periodically; for example, home visits could be made in lieu of a staff meeting once a month. However, school staff need to be flexible and understand that not all parents will be able to receive a home visit during the day and may request that visits be made after school hours or on weekends. Teachers who have seen the usefulness of making home visits will be truly invested in the program be willing to be more flexible and work around parent schedules. But in the end, the onus should be on the district and school to provide teachers with flex time or some other compensation for their time. In addition, teachers should have access to interpreters in order to reach families who speak a language other than English in their home. This is essential if schools are going to be able to reach ALL families.
5) For schools, teachers and families to truly embrace the tenets of a home visiting program, home visit training should not be staff development that is provided only when there is nothing else to learn but instead be provided at least annually so that new teachers can learn the techniques of making a home visit and understand the purpose of making connections with families. Shorter training sessions could also be provided to veteran teachers who just want a little refresher before beginning to make home visits at the start of each year. Such training could also give teachers the opportunity to share their home visit experiences with one another and discuss any problems or roadblocks that have arisen. As a part of the training provided to teachers, useful tools should be provided to them, such as the researcher’s handbook, to support teachers in using the information they learn during home visits and translate it into improve classroom practices.

6) Participation in a home visiting program should continue to be voluntary for teachers as well as for families – there is no one thing that works for all people and home visits are just one example of ways that schools can reach out to families and develop meaningful communication between home and school. Utilizing Joyce Epstein et al.’s (2002) Framework for Parent Involvement would be an excellent place to start when trying to find other ways to engage parents in their child’s education. Schools and individual teachers should continually reflect on their use of various parent involvement activities to ensure that these activities reflect the cultural diversity of the population being served by the school and are inclusive for all families.

7) Parents should be encouraged to share their views on home visits whenever possible. Many parents have shared with this researcher how home visits helped them to feel more
empowered to help their child learn at home and to feel more comfortable partnering with their child’s school. Parent testimonials could be documented on video or shared live during training workshops. They could also be posted on informational websites dedicated to encouraging parent involvement. Teachers find parent experiences particularly moving and inspirational. They could mean the difference between a teacher choosing to make home visits or declining to participate. Such stories demonstrate to teachers that parents do not only value their efforts but that their time doing home visits is time well spent. In addition, other parents could benefit from hearing the stories of successful accounts of relationship building generated by home visits.

8) Lastly, site administrators who are encouraging more parent involvement at their school sites and are developing a home visiting program should take the time to get to know the model that the site is using and go on visits as part of the team. The best way to learn about what the teachers and families at your school are doing to build relationships is by doing it with them.

It is this researcher’s hope that her Classroom Action Research project on Home Visits will inspire other teachers to investigate how building relationships with families can help support student achievement in the classroom and empower parents to take a more active role in their child’s education. In addition, the researcher hopes that her coworkers at Vineland Preschool find this handbook useful as they continue making visits to the homes of their students for many years to come.
APPENDIX A

Home/School Compact Letters in English, Spanish, and Russian
RioLinda
Union School District

Parent/Teacher Involvement Program
Home-School Compact Addendum
Allison Elementary School

Our school has the opportunity to participate in The Nell Soto Parent-Teacher Involvement Program to strengthen communication between schools and parents as a means of improving student achievement. In order to participate in this program, elementary schools must have voluntarily signed agreements from at least 50 percent of parents or guardians of enrolled students that they agree to participate in periodic home visits (in which a teacher and/or classified employee visits the homes of students). Home visits will be scheduled at times convenient for parents or guardians. Interpreting services will be available.

I ______________ agree to participate in a voluntary parent-teacher home visit. I understand home visits are designed to strengthen communication between home and school and to provide parents with tools and strategies to support their students academically.

Signature, Parent/Guardian  Date

Printed Name, Parent/Guardian

Name of student/students
Río Linda Union School District

Programa de Participación de criía/maestro

Enseñe en casa el Apéndice Compacto

Escuela Allison Elementary

La nota: Este documento debe ser firmado por padres que ya han firmado un enseña en casa compacto. Los padres que no ya han firmado un enseña en casa compacto debe firmar un solo documento que incluye el enseña en casa compacto y un acuerdo para tomar parte en las visitas de padres y maestros de hogar.

Nuestra escuela tiene la oportunidad de tomar parte en El Nell Soto el Programa de padres y maestros de la Participación para reforzar comunicación entre escuelas y padres para mejorar el logro de estudiante. Para tomar parte en este programa, las escuelas de enseñanza primaria deben haber firmado voluntariamente los acuerdos de por lo menos 50 por ciento de padres o guardianes de estudiantes matriculados que ellos concuerdan en tomar parte en las visitas periódicas de hogar (en que un maestro y/o empleado clasificado visitan los hogares de estudiantes). Las visitas del hogar se planificarán a veces conveniente para padres o guardianes. Interpretar los servicios estarán disponibles.

Yo _______________ concuerda en tomar parte en un padre voluntario-

(Imprimió el Nombre de Padre)

El maestro en casa visita. Entiendo en casa que visitas se diseñan para reforzar

comunicación entre en casa y la escuela y para proporcionar a padres con

__________________________

La firma, la Fecha de Criía/Guardián

__________________________

El Nombre impreso, el Criía/Guardián

__________________________

El nombre de estudiante/estudiantes
Программа Причастности Родителя/Преподавателя
Домашняя школа Уплотняет Приложение
Начальная школа Hillsdale

Отметьте: Этот документ должен быть подписан родителями, которые уже подписали компактную домашнюю школу. Родители, которые уже не подписали компактную домашнюю школу, должны подписать единственный документ, который включает и компактную домашнюю школу, и соглашение, чтобы участвовать в родительском преподавателе домой посещает.

Наша школа имеет возможность участвовать в Программе Причастности Родительского преподавателя Нел Сото, чтобы усилить коммуникацию между школами и родителями как средство улучшения студенческого достижения. Чтобы участвовать в этой программе, начальные школы, должно быть, добровольно подписать соглашение по крайней мере от 50 процентов родителей или опекунов зарегистрированных студентов, что они согласны участвовать в периодических домашних посещениях (в котором преподаватель и/или классифицировал посещения служащего дома студентов).

Я __________________________, согласуюсь участвовать в добровольном родительском преподавателе домой посещает. Я понимаю, что домашние посещения разработаны, чтобы усилить коммуникацию между домом и школой и обеспечивать родителей инструменты и стратегии поддерживать их студентов академически.

________________________
Подпись, Дата Родителя/Опекуна

________________________
Печатное Название, Родитель/Опекун
APPENDIX B

Home Visit Tool Kit Locker at Warren A. Allison Elementary School
## Home Visit Tool Kit Locker at Warren A. Allison Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>First Grade</th>
<th>Second Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large pencils</td>
<td>Small pencils</td>
<td>Small pencils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large crayons</td>
<td>Small crayons</td>
<td>Washable markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasers</td>
<td>Erasers</td>
<td>Bottles of white glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stickers</td>
<td>Blunt, universal scissors</td>
<td>Universal scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blunt, universal scissors</td>
<td>Glue sticks</td>
<td>Erasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glue sticks</td>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
<td>Long rulers</td>
<td>Long rulers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rulers</td>
<td>Pad of lined paper (large)</td>
<td>Pad of lined paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank pad of paper</td>
<td>Number facts flash cards</td>
<td>Laminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet flash cards</td>
<td>Laminated sight words</td>
<td>multiplication facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic shapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laminated mat with pictures of AlphaFriends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Grade</th>
<th>Fourth Grade</th>
<th>Fifth Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small pencils</td>
<td>Small pencils</td>
<td>Small pencils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washable markers</td>
<td>Bottles of white glue</td>
<td>Bottles of white glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottles of white glue</td>
<td>Universal scissors</td>
<td>Universal scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal scissors</td>
<td>Erasers</td>
<td>Erasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasers</td>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil sharpeners</td>
<td>Long rulers</td>
<td>Long rulers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long rulers</td>
<td>Pad of lined paper</td>
<td>Packs of 3-ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pad of lined paper</td>
<td>Solar calculators</td>
<td>binder paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar calculators</td>
<td>Protractors</td>
<td>Scientific calculators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White boards</td>
<td>Compasses</td>
<td>Protractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White board markers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Compasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White board erasers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daily organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Pre and Post Attitude Scales for Initial Home Visits
**PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #1**

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability.
   - Agree
   - Disagree

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.
   - Agree
   - Disagree

3. Family believes education is important for their child.
   - Agree
   - Disagree

4. Family reads to child nightly.
   - Agree
   - Disagree

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.
   - Agree
   - Disagree

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.
   - Agree
   - Disagree
# POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family believes education is important for their child.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family reads to child nightly.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Agree" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Disagree" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #2

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child's disability.  
   Agree  Disagree

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.  
   Agree  Disagree

3. Family believes education is important for their child.  
   Agree  Disagree

4. Family reads to child nightly.  
   Agree  Disagree

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.  
   Agree  Disagree

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.  
   Agree  Disagree
POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #2

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability. [Agree] [Disagree]

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school. [Agree] [Disagree]

3. Family believes education is important for their child. [Agree] [Disagree]

4. Family reads to child nightly. [Agree] [Disagree]

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities. [Agree] [Disagree]

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home. [Agree] [Disagree]
**PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family believes education is important for their child.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family reads to child nightly.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.</td>
<td>![Smiley face] ![Sad face]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #3

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child's disability.
   Agree  Disagree

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.
   Agree  Disagree

3. Family believes education is important for their child.
   Agree  Disagree

4. Family reads to child nightly.
   Agree  Disagree

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.
   Agree  Disagree

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.
   Agree  Disagree
PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #4

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

3. Family believes education is important for their child.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

4. Family reads to child nightly.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family is knowledgeable about their child's disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Family believes education is important for their child.</td>
</tr>
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<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Family reads to child nightly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.</td>
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<td><img src="image9.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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<td>6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image11.png" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #5

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child’s disability.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️

3. Family believes education is important for their child.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️

4. Family reads to child nightly.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.  
   Agree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ Disagree ☑️ ☑️ ☑️ ☑️
POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale-Family #5

1. Family is knowledgeable about their child's disability.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

2. Family is happy with progress child is making in school.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

3. Family believes education is important for their child.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

4. Family reads to child nightly.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

5. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree

6. Family uses positive reinforcement in the home.  
   - Agree  
   - Disagree
APPENDIX D

School Information Magnet Pages in English and Spanish
Allison School

Allison School    566-1810
Attendance       566-1810
Cafeteria Staff  566-1810 x 2218
Miss Paula’s Email paula.ramsay@rlusd.org
Miss Paula’s Classroom 566-1810 x 2331
Allison School

Oficina de la escuela    566-1810
Reportar ausencia       566-1810
Cafetería             566-1810 x 2218
Email de Miss Paula   paula.ramsay@rlusd.org
Teléfono de clase     566-1810 x 2331
APPENDIX E

Welcome Bags Provided to Students During Initial Home Visits
APPENDIX F

Notes Page from Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project’s Handouts
## The Follow Up
(copy this sheet for each student)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Telephone/Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Call
- Scheduled Visit?  
- Date and Time  
- Translator or Colleague Attending?

### First Visit
- Topics Discussed  
- New Knowledge  
- Follow Up Needed?  
  - Questions or concerns of family?

### Second Visit
- Topics Discussed  
- Strategies/Tools  
- Follow Up Needed?  
  - Any materials for family?

### End of Year Evaluation
- Improvements in behavior, attendance, or academic testing?  
- Parent support with homework or more visible at school?  
- Suggestions for Next Year?
APPENDIX G

Reflection Forms
Post-Home Visit Notes
(Do not take notes during the visit!!)

Name of student: __________________________________________

Date of Visit: ______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Members Present</th>
<th>Child’s Likes &amp; Dislikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hopes &amp; Dreams</th>
<th>Items To Follow Up On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-Home Visit Reflections
(reflect on the visit & what you learned about the child & their family)

Name of Child: ______________

How can I use the information I learned to support learning in the classroom?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________


Post-Home Visit Classroom Information Sheet

Name of Child: _______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Adaptive Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pre-Academic Skills</th>
<th>Gross Motor</th>
<th>Play Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Fine Motor</th>
<th>Social/Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H

PowerPoint Presentation: Using Home Visits to Support Your Special Education Classroom
NOTES:

Salutation
Introduce self; years of teaching; levels taught; current position
Years of doing home visits using this model; years total
Introduce Renee Perry (parent & home visit trainer)
Both Founding members of RLUSD home visit team; train across our district
Both members of local and state training - originators of home visit project PTHVP
Renee has traveled to Washington, DC to talk about home visits
“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship”

Dr. James Comer

NOTES:

Read quote
Purpose of home visits is to create a “significant relationship” with the families
Why is it important to have a relationship with the families of your students?
Read “If She Only Knew Me” by Jeff Gray & Heather Thomas using overhead projector to show photos from book (Renee) while Paula reads from book (bring tissues!!!)
What does **typical** parent involvement look like?

- Attending meetings/conferences
  - Chaperoning field trips
- Volunteering in the classroom
  - Joining PTA
  - Fundraising
- Helping child with homework

Periodic phone calls/email/notes

NOTES:

Most of these activities put parents in the subordinate position to teachers
Do nothing to “empower” families and help them to feel like valued
participants in their child’s education – parents should be partners
“The definition of meaningful parent involvement is much broader than
originally believed.”
In most cases, typical parent involvement requires that parents come to the school!

NOTES:

We make them come to us & when they don’t come, we think they don’t care! Difficulty reaching families who don’t have transportation, work multiple jobs, don’t speak English “Families of all backgrounds support their children’s learning at home, however, white, middle class parents tend to be more involved at school.” If parents speak the same language as the school personnel, their children are at more of an advantage As educators, it is our job to reach ALL families & students – but how???
How are these home visits different from SARB/CPS visits?

- Participation is VOLUNTARY
- Purpose is to foster a more personal relationship with the family
- Focus is on getting to know the family and your student
- Visitor is not there to “scold” or judge the family

NOTES:

The visits that we are proposing are very different from the typical reasons teachers & school staff visit homes - CPS, SARB, IEPs, etc. Participating is voluntary for both parents & teachers Do not JUDGE families for any reason
How can home visits change your school?

- Improve attendance rates
- Improve test scores
- Decrease suspensions & expulsions
- Decrease vandalism at your school site

taken from the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project website

NOTES:

Research has shown that schools that used home visits across the board saw an increase in all of these areas.
Sacramento Unified School District has done extensive research in this regard - 10 yrs. worth of home visits.
CSUS completed a 3 yr. study of the results from 14 different home visit pilot schools.
Also other outside agencies have evaluated their research findings.
How can home visits help YOU in your classroom?

- Foster a more personal relationship with the families of your students
- Provide valuable information about your individual students
- Increase your understanding of the needs of your students
- Increase parental involvement in more meaningful ways

NOTES:

For me, this was the most valuable thing about home visits - getting to know my students better
Our job as educators is to educate the whole child
Especially in special ed. we can learn valuable information about our students that will directly impact our classroom - likes/dislikes, hobbies, afterschool activities, etc.
Refer to reflection forms in Handbook
NOTES:

Renee shares her story of having three children – two sons with special needs – and being on the receiving end of home visits & how they changed her life. Renee also discusses her work as a home visit trainer who travels across the country with the PTHVP
Home Visit Model
Developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project

FALL
♦ Phone ahead
♦ “relationship building”
♦ expectations
♦ “hopes & dreams”
♦ invite parents back to school

SPRING
♦ Phone ahead
♦ may be done prior to STAR testing
♦ tool kits
♦ “empower” families
♦ invite parents back to school

NOTES:

Two visit model - Fall & Spring - each lasting 40 - 45 minutes
Go in pairs! Grade level partner, paraeducator, translator, speech therapist, etc.
Call Ahead
Where can a home visit take place?

- Family’s home
- On family’s front porch/lawn
- At a local coffee shop or restaurant
- At a park
- At a local community center
- Be creative!
- At school - last resort!

NOTES:

Remember: The purpose of this visit is to develop a significant relationship with the family - that starts by making the parent feel comfortable
More likely to feel comfortable in their own home
Most parents are surprised that a teacher would WANT to visit their homes
Children are SO EXCITED!
Some parents may not want you to see their home (shame, mistrust, etc.) but may be willing to meet with you somewhere else - that is ok!
AS A LAST RESORT, if the parent insists on coming to the school, honor their wish
The Call

- Make it personal - introduce yourself
- Explain purpose of visit - “get to know you”
- Offer options of days/times that work best
- If bringing someone else (coworker, etc.) make sure to inform parent; ask if interpreter is needed
- Reminder call day before visit & verify address
- Indicate any allergies or fears regarding pets that you may have - be honest!

NOTES:

Have a script so you don’t stumble - see Handbook for ideas
Don’t sound like a telemarketer - relax!
Explain that you just want to get to know them better - they don’t need to clean for you
Be sure to mention if you are bringing someone else - don’t wait until after they have agreed to have you visit to spring that on them (ask about interpreter)
Tell them that you will call them the day before to make sure it is still ok to come
If you are allergic to dogs, ask if the family has dogs - don’t be afraid!
Visit 1:
Strategies for Relationship Building

- Ask open-ended questions
- Don’t write anything down! You are here to listen! **
- Use pictures on the walls to initiate conversation
- Ask family how long they’ve lived in the home/neighborhood/city
- Ask what your student likes to do after school, on the weekends, etc.

NOTES:

Before you enter - check your assumptions at the door! Don’t let anything you see phase you
Introduce yourself & thank them for allowing you to visit - remind purpose of visit
Did you bring anything for the child? A book? A pencil box?
If using a translator, have translator sit beside parent but not in between you & the parent - maintain eye contact with the parent and speak to the parent NOT the translator
Your job is to listen! Don’t spend time writing until parent asks you a question that you need to get back to them about - then ask first before writing!
Visit 1 continued: Talking about Expectations

- Ask parent what their expectations are of you as their child’s teacher
- Let parents know what your expectations are of them (check backpack nightly, read, journals, etc.)

NOTES:

Ask parent what their expectations are of you as their child’s teacher - acknowledge what they tell you!
Let parents know your expectations - homework, communication journals, nightly reading, etc.
Visit 1 continued:
The “hopes & dreams” question

• “what are your hopes & dreams for your child?”
• Be prepared! Some parents have NEVER been asked this before & may need time to form their answer

NOTES:
This question is a biggie! Be sensitive - if child was recently diagnosed, maybe ask for goal for the year instead of life goal
Acknowledge what they tell you & how you may be able to address it in your classroom
Visit 1 continued: Invite parents to school

- Let the parent know they are welcome at school!
- Bring invitation to a school event (First day celebration, Morning Sing, etc.)
- Bring a fridge magnet with contact information

NOTES:

Invite parents to an upcoming school event
For example, I do my Fall visits prior to the beginning of the school year and therefore invite parents to the First Day Celebration or to Kindergarten Orientation
Give the parent a little something - fridge magnet is a great idea & easy to make
Visit 2: Empowering Families

- Use this visit to focus on one or two areas the student is struggling with
- Show parent the level their child is currently working at and the level you’d like them to progress to
- Bring a prepared tool kit that allows parents to help their child at home
- Teach parent to use the tool kit - empower them!

NOTES:

Early Spring - go with a partner!
Again, call ahead but this time, tell parent you have something you’d like to share with them regarding their child’s performance at school
When you get there, talk to parent about child’s performance in a particular area; use scale in appendix to show parent where child is functioning and where you’d like them to go
Bring a personalized, unique tool kit designed for their child & the deficit you are trying to address
Show parent how to use the tool kit - give them the power to help their child succeed
Visit 2 continued: Invite parents to school

- Remind parent that they are welcome at school!
- Bring invitation to school event (Open House, Morning Sing, Family Reading Night, etc.)

NOTES:

Again, invite parents to an upcoming event at school - Open House, Award Ceremony, class party, morning sing - anything! Let them know they are always welcome!
Visit 2 continued:
Tool Kit ideas

- Numbers with Touch points
- Number boards
- Multiplication tables
- Sight word lists/flash cards
- Portable visual schedules
- Work systems
- Reward charts
- Communication symbols/boards

NOTES:

Be creative!
Don’t go overboard - you’ll overwhelm them
Let’s be Honest...

We all have:
• Fears
• Assumptions
• Barriers holding us back

NOTES:

We all have fears about home visits - Mine? Dangerous neighborhood
What are some of yours?
Assumptions - Mine? If child is misbehaving at school, it’s because their parents have no
control over them at home - allowed to do whatever they want
What are yours?
What fears may be stopping you from making a home visit?

- Safety concerns
- Mandated reporting - CPS
- Pets/allergies
- Food related concerns

NOTES:

Safety concerns - go in the daylight - let someone know where you are
If you get to the home & something doesn’t feel right, leave - trust your instincts
GO IN PAIRS!
In over 10 yrs. of making visits, there have only been a few occasions where CPS was
called as a direct result of a home visit - parents know you are coming - you called ahead
- anything you see while you are there is likely a cry for help!
Pets - meet outside or at a different location other than school or home
Food - tell family you already ate - ask if you can take it with you instead
What fears may stop families from accepting a home visit?

- Personal experiences - trust issues
- Negative past experiences with the school (SARB, etc.)
- Fear of being judged - “checked up on”

NOTES:

Everyone has baggage
Barriers

• Language & Culture
  • What if I don’t speak their language? That’s what an interpreter is for!
  • What if I’m not familiar with the family’s culture?

• Funding
  • Title 1
  • Nell Soto Parent Teacher Interaction Grant
  • Donors Choose

NOTES:

If you don’t speak their language - bring an interpreter with you
If no interpreter is available for that language, is there an older sibling who could translate? Or a family member or neighbor?
Culture - don’t make assumptions! No two people are alike even if they are from the same culture or ethnicity
Do some reading about family’s culture or ask coworkers who have interacted with the family in the past
Parents will be understanding if they see that you are trying to reach out to them
Funding - tricky
Gov’t stipulates that portion of Title 1 funds go directly to parent involvement
Nell Soto Grant - see CDE website - no guarantee funds will be renewed
Tool kits - Donors Choose is a great source!
A Challenge.....

NOTES:

I challenge you to go on a home visit - you are welcome to come with me any time! Or invite me to come on one with you!
Talk to your principal - make a presentation to your school board
The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project train teachers in local school districts - visit their website to find out more
Websites you may be interested in

- [www.pthvp.org](http://www.pthvp.org)
- [www.rocketpublishing.net](http://www.rocketpublishing.net)
- [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/nellsoto.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/nellsoto.asp)
- [www.donorschoose.org](http://www.donorschoose.org)
- My email paula.ramsay@rlusd.org

NOTES:

Check these sites out to learn more
Contact me any time with questions, concerns, etc.
APPENDIX I

If She Only Knew Me by Jeff Gray and Heather Thomas
Due to copyright laws, I am only including the front cover of the book If She Only Knew Me. While reading the text of the story aloud, I showed the photographs from the story on an overhead projector.
APPENDIX J

Handout Provided to Participants of the PowerPoint Presentation and Home Visit Training at California State University, Sacramento
The Call

Guidelines for Making the Call

- Introduce yourself.
- State the purpose of your call.
- Offer a couple of dates and times you are available.
- Be sure to let the parent know how long you will need.
- Inform the parent if someone will accompany you.
- Find out if an interpreter is needed.
- If the parent is resistant to meeting at home, please offer an alternative location (i.e., local library, restaurant, park or community center).

Sample Phone Script

Hi, Mr/Ms ____________________.

I am ____________’s teacher. How are you today?

I’m calling because I want to get to know my parents and students and I want them to get to know me as well.

I know how much your son/daughter means to you and I have no doubt that, together, you and I will make this the best year for him/her.

I would like to set up a time when I can visit your home with my colleague ______. It’s a short visit that will not take more than 40 minutes.

The two dates I had in mind were ______________________ at ___:

or ______________________ at ___. Do either of these times work for you?

If not, when would be better?

Okay, I’ll call you that day to confirm.

See you then!
### The Follow Up
*(copy this sheet for each student)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Telephone/Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Image" /></td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Call</th>
<th>Scheduled Visit?</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Translator or Colleague Attending?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Image" /></td>
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<th>First Visit</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
<th>New Knowledge</th>
<th>Follow Up Needed?</th>
<th>Questions or concerns of family?</th>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Image" /></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Visit</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
<th>Strategies/Tools</th>
<th>Follow Up Needed?</th>
<th>Any materials for family?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image14" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image15" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image16" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
<th>End of Year Evaluation</th>
<th>Improvements in behavior, attendance, or academic testing?</th>
<th>Parent support with homework or more visible at school?</th>
<th>Suggestions for Next Year?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image19" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image20" alt="Image" /></td>
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"MEETING STANDARDS" means that a child scores at "PROFICIENT" or "ADVANCED."
APPENDIX K

Participant Surveys from PowerPoint Presentation and Home Visit Training
The following is a transcript of answers from the evaluation form provided to participants of the PowerPoint presentation and Home Visit titled “Using Home Visits to Support Your Special Education Classroom” training at California State University, Sacramento. Each participant was asked to respond to three questions.

Using Home Visits to Support Your Special Education Classroom

Evaluation Form

1. What did you find useful about this training?

Good information regarding home visits—Great food for thought

Great! I have never been interested in home visits, but you made it seem reasonable. Nice disposition with both presenters.

Everything—great presentation! Enjoyed parent view and input!

It kept Molly quiet for 2 ¼ hours. Great personal anecdotes—looking at the parent’s point of view regarding fears, etc.

PowerPoint well done Thoughtful and informative at best

To see both Renee and Paula working together. I like the handout about visits.

I enjoyed all the conversations about why home visits are important. It was encouraging.

Yes, I did. I didn’t know about home visit grants. I just wonder how it would work for middle schoolers! Parents seem a lot more distant.

Great resources! Thanks for the PowerPoint slides. Having Renee speak was very powerful.

Great resources and greatly enjoyed the personal experience from parent. Wonderful ideas for home visits

Everything! I really appreciate hearing the parent perspective and having the personal experience shared with us.

I really enjoyed listening to Renee speak about her personal experiences as a parent. I felt it was really enlightening and a fresh perspective to hear.

The parent input and the websites.
Parent participation Idea behind home visits (Fall guideline for visit & Spring)

Having a parent perspective was very nice. I like the fact that we were provided with a “script” for our initial conversations with the families.

Sending a tool kit home Having a parent point of view.

Paula gave a nice overview explanation of the model. Renee’s parent perspective was insightful and moving.

Good to get information from a teacher and parent involved in home visits—how it works & how it is received

Lots of good information Loved having a parent involved and willing to share personal insights

The details of how home visits worked

All the information and personal view from parent & teacher on home visits • web links • outline of 1 & 2 visits and topics to talk about • tool kits ideas • tips on how to approach families on/about first meeting • List of all possible outcomes of home visit

Website links • guidelines handout • slides handout • parent’s perspective

Lots of powerful information! The websites are all useful and concise sometimes too many websites get ignored


2. What could have been better about this training?

The only change I would make is to shorten your examples a little bit, though your examples were interesting.

You could probably use less slides. You did a good job but I don’t see need quite so many. Also, don’t let the audience talk so much. Some people like to hear themselves talk.

Nothing! 😊

Snacks! More input from Molly.
Streamline—shorten incorporate DVD into presentation  [Thoughtful and informative at best] but repetitive at worst

Timing—don’t allow others to take you off track—you both have so much to share

The presentation was very long (although interesting) either less slides or less time per slide – condense

Possibly reduced in length. However it was very informative and contained a lot of good information.

Maybe a short break

Was great information on each slide, but maybe could have moved through them a bit faster in the beginning and a bit slower towards the end.

More information about secondary visits

Maybe a checklist for how to utilize a home visit in the classroom

Maybe get the If She Knew Me story scanned to include in PowerPoint

Lecture/lecture could have been shortened—2 hrs is a bit long to stay focused—even for adults—BUT…information and presentation were both great.

A little long

A little more information on how home visits work through high school students—both gen ed and spec ed.

Needed a restroom break • Stop the long-talkers who always need to talk a lot in class. We hear them all the time, but really wanted to listen to you and your ideas—not the same old comments from same classmates.

Maybe the pacing of the presentation so that you have lots of time to spend on each section because it was all very interesting & informative

Seems like there was some repetitive slides—perhaps merge them. Good information!

more concise –less time on “typical” parent involvement –ways to break down barriers for parents – put them @ ease
3. I would greatly appreciate any comments you would like to make.

I liked your enthusiasm—you are a good presenter! And it was great to have a parent with experience of home visits!

It is great to have a parent speaker! Great Job!

I enjoyed hearing the two different aspects from a teacher and a concerned parent. Very informative!

I enjoyed hearing Renee’s story. I am amazed at how much she does for education. Paula’s care for her students and their families is great.

When my school sent home invitations to the parents I only got one back. Unfortunately this family had a drive by shooting & someone died at their house last year… 😞

I really appreciate your willingness to have us contact you. I loved the intro of the boys story it really helped drive the importance of relationship building home to teachers I think. I am in ECSE so I am very aware of relationship building & family driven. I appreciate the perspective being present across education Thank you Thank you

Very useful and informative. I feel motivated to make more home visits in the future 😊

This was a really good first presentation. Well thought-out. You gave a good “basic” introduction and “re-introduction” to those who have done home-visits. In districts where teachers come and go, home visits can create a connection that prevents parents from checking out.

I enjoyed the idea of the toolkit

This was a great presentation. It was very inspiring and also made me challenge my thoughts on home visits. I’m glad that the common fears of home visits were addressed.

Keeping a presentation to 1 ½ hours if after a full workday. Maybe adding in your experience, when is typically the best time for a visit AM/PM, Weekday/end, should both parents be there?

You & Renee did a great job of presenting a lot of information but kept the personal view Thank you!

I liked your opening. It was a good segway into why we need to do home visits. I liked that you allowed the audience to participate and share additional info.
I loved the team approach to this presentation. It really dispelled many fears I initially had. Thank you! I am going to try this.

You are a very engaging speaker – your joy and belief in this process really comes across. Thanks
APPENDIX L

Using Home Visits To Make Connections With Families: A Handbook for Educators at Vineland Preschool Utilizing the Home Visit Model Developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project
Using Home Visits To Make Connections With Families

A Handbook For Educators at Vineland Preschool Utilizing the Home Visit Model developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project, Sacramento, CA

Created By:

Paula Ramsay
Master of Arts Degree in Special Education
California State University, Sacramento

Forward By:
Renee Perry
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the members of the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento, CA who first introduced me to "home visits". Although I had been visiting the homes of my students for many years prior to meeting them, the members of the PTHVP helped me put into words the reasons WHY I was visiting my students and WHAT I was trying to accomplish by doing so. I cannot thank them enough for teaching me everything they knew about home visits and for allowing me to find my own way as well.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful staff of teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals, psychologists, administrators, and support staff at Vineland Preschool in the Twin Rivers Unified School District. I couldn’t ask for a better group of people to work with. I enjoy every day with you sharing what we learn from the little ones who share their lives with us every day.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all of the families past & present who invited me into their homes and allowed me to learn from them. You are the best teachers! Thank you for all that you have taught me!
DEDICATION

This handbook is dedicated to all of the wonderful students and families who have crossed my path and all of the wonderful students and families whom I have yet to meet. I look forward to riding this roller coaster together with you, hand-in-hand as partners in your child’s education.
FOREWORD

By

Renee Perry

Home visits are powerful because they put parents in their comfort zone so that they aren’t intimidated by school personnel. By inviting you into our homes, we are reaching out and showing you that we want to develop a relationship with you. We need your positivity and support. Communication is so important for us as is the feeling of being comfortable. Take the time to establish a rapport with us! It is vital!

Receiving home visits has helped with my child’s confidence and growth and created a comfortable relationship with my child’s teacher that allowed for increased information sharing between teacher and home. Because I feel that home visits are such an effective means of engaging parents and teachers in fostering two-way communication, I decided to help train teachers by sharing my story and experiences with home visits.

It is important that teachers be trained before they begin to make home visits so that they learn to listen and give the parents the opportunity to share what they know about their children. Home visits aren’t a space
where teachers should impose their assumptions about parents and their cultures and choices about raising their children. All we ask is that teachers accept us as we are and encourage us to use our strengths to support our children!

It is crucial that teachers learn to listen in a place where parents feel comfortable. When you are in our homes, we have the power and we are the teachers. Be open to hearing our opinions and our dreams for the future, and support us as we deal with the ups and downs of being a parent.

For me, the best part of home visits is seeing how teachers who were difficult to reach change as they get to know their students and their families and how the way they treat our children changes. Home visits show our children that you care and see them as special individuals that you love.

Hopefully Paula’s handbook will encourage you to recognize the benefits of making home visits for establishing relationships with us, the parents of your students. And, by using this handbook you will think about your assumptions and fears and enter our homes ready to listen and learn so that the educational experience can be better for everyone.
What is a Home Visit?

It’s as simple as it sounds! A home visit is a chance for teachers to visit the homes of their students and interact with their family members. Home visits don't have to be at the family's home. They can be held at the park, at a coffee shop, or on the front porch!

Why should I make a home visit?

Because it’s a great way to get to know your students outside of school & research shows that home visits are an excellent way of encouraging parents to have more involvement in their child’s education. You can learn valuable information you may not discover in the classroom that will improve your ability to facilitate learning. In addition, home visits show the families of your students that you care & want to get to know them better!
Why can't I just meet with parents at school?

When you meet with a parent at school, even in an informal way, the “power” is in your corner. You are in charge and the parent is there to listen to what you say. But when you meet a parent in their home, they are in charge and YOU are there to listen to what THEY say. It’s all about them! Listen actively and let them share their ideas, needs and desires.

I’ve invited parents to school but they don’t come. I don’t think they want to get involved!

First of all, every parent wants to be involved in their child’s education! But they don’t always know how.

There are many reasons why parents don’t come to organized school events:
- work commitments  - poor childhood school experience
- child care issues  - language barriers
- didn’t receive invitation  - no transportation
- feel intimidated by school personnel
- fear of hearing negative things about their child
How many home visits do I need to make?

Well, that depends. How many do you want to make? Generally speaking, you should make at least two visits per year to the homes of each of your students (parent participation is voluntary). The first visit should be made at the beginning of the school year (Fall) and the second could be made towards the end of the year (Spring). However, here at Vineland we are expected to do home visits in lieu of parent conferences in November of each year.

Why two visits? Can’t I just make one?

The first visit allows you to get to know the family & show that you care about their child. You can also gain useful information that can be used in your classroom to create activities for each student. The second visit is a chance for you to empower the parents & give them tools they can use to help their child succeed in school. It’s a partnership!
Home Visit Model
Developed by the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project

Home Visit #1
(Fall)
• purpose: relationship building
• use active listening techniques
• ask get-to-know-you questions
• discuss expectations of school & home; hopes & dreams question
• bring welcome kit for child & invitation to school event for parent

Home Visit #2
(Spring)
• purpose: empowerment
  • discuss child’s academic successes & areas of need
• provide simple, easy to use tools parents can use at home to support learning
• demonstrate how to use tools
• bring an invitation to an upcoming school event

What could you do on a 3rd visit?
• bring more tools for parents to use at home
• observe the child’s in-home program
• participate in a meeting with child’s in-home program
• attend the child’s birthday party
• help parents set up sensory diet activities in the home
• talk with parents about any concerns or needs they have
• talk with parents about transition to kindergarten
**Ok, you've convinced me. How do I do it?**

**There are 3 easy steps to follow!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Call</th>
<th>The Visit</th>
<th>The Follow-Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• practice with a friend</td>
<td>• call the day before to confirm visit &amp; directions</td>
<td>• send a thank you card! Don't wait!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use a script that you feel comfortable with</td>
<td>• if you are bringing a partner, remind parent so they are not surprised</td>
<td>• get back to parent about questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to start, call parents you are already familiar with &amp; slowly ease into your visits</td>
<td>• bring gift for child &amp; invitation for parent</td>
<td>• reflect on information learned during visit &amp; how it applies to classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• don’t take notes during visit unless necessary</td>
<td>• develop new classroom strategies based on information learned</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• complete reflection after visit</td>
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</table>

**Trouble Shooting Tips**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Call</th>
<th>The Visit</th>
<th>The Follow Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• use an interpreter if parent is unfamiliar with English</td>
<td>• take the family's phone number with you</td>
<td>• if parents requested information about their child's performance &amp; you told them they could come in for a conference, don't forget to set it up right away!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• if the parent is resistant to a visit, suggest an alternative place to meet i.e park, coffee shop, etc.</td>
<td>• if there is a dog in the front yard that is menacing, don't go to the door; call the parent &amp; let them know you are outside</td>
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</table>
Let’s talk about those fears you may have about making home visits…

Who Me?  Yes you! Everyone has fears & that’s ok! The important thing is what we do about those fears & whether or not we let them stop us from making home visits.

What are some fears you have about visiting the homes of your students?

Take a few minutes to think about what might be preventing you from making a home visit tomorrow! Write them down & reflect on these fears often and ask yourself if they are realistic or are they just excuses?

Some of my fears include…

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Some of the most common fears teachers have:

- **I am a mandated reporter; what if I see something in the home that I have to report?**
  - in 10 years of making home visits, the members of the PTHVP only had to make a handful of reports to CPS
  - the family knows that you are coming and they know you are a mandated reporter! anything that you see is likely a cry for help

- **If I am unfamiliar with a family's culture, I may do something to offend them**
  - in almost all cultures, teachers are revered & honored; families will be very forgiving as you get to know them
  - talk to someone from the same culture as the family about any customs you should be aware of

- **I am allergic to/afraid of animals; what if the family has pets?**
  - before the visit, ask the family if they have animals & explain your allergy/fear
  - request that you meet on the front porch or that the animal be kept in another room

- **What if a family offers me food that I don't like?**
  - when you make the phone call to set up the visit, tell the family they don't have to prepare anything special for you
  - if they do prepare food, politely tell them that you just ate & ask if you can take some home instead

- **I am afraid of going into an unsafe situation/neighborhood**
  - visit this family with a partner i.e. a coworker, paraeducator, etc.
  - make the visit during the daylight hours

- **What if I call & the parent doesn't want a home visit?**
  - participation is voluntary - if a parent doesn't want a home visit you could also suggest an alternative meeting place
  - if the parent still doesn't want a visit, respect their wishes but tell them you will ask again at a later date

Remember: it's ok to have fears, just don't let them prevent you from reaching out to families!
Safety Tips for Going On A Home Visit

- Make visits during daylight hours (early morning before school or early evening after school)
- Go with a partner (e.g., paraeducators, speech therapist, school psychologist, grade level partner, etc.)
- If going alone, make sure someone knows where you are going and when to expect you back
- If making multiple visits on one day, make sure your car has enough gas to get you from one visit to the next
- Bring your cell phone with you & make sure it is charged
- Check your directions with the family you are visiting - they know the best way to get to their home!
- If a situation arises in the home that you are uncomfortable with, politely make your exit
- Map the locations ahead of time so you aren’t fumbling around for directions while driving
- Trust your instincts! If you arrive at the home & something doesn’t feel right, don’t go in!

Don’t let your fears and assumptions about the neighborhood stop you from visiting the homes of your students! Many times, when neighbors see a teacher coming to visit a family, they want to know why their child’s teacher doesn’t visit their homes!
Now let’s talk about our assumptions...

Assumptions are a set of beliefs held by a person based on his or her experience, culture, environments, and value system.

Taken from the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project

Both teachers & parents can have assumptions about the other that keep them from working together as equal partners!

Teachers assume:
1) parents don't want them in their homes
2) the parents of children who are not achieving in school don't care about their child’s education
3) if children misbehave at school, it’s because they don’t have any boundaries at home

Parents assume:
1) teachers don't have anything good to say about their child
2) schools don't really care what parents think
3) schools only cater to middle class, white families

What are some assumptions you have?
Take some time to think about your assumptions & how they are preventing you from making connections with your students and their families...
Use this PRE attitude scale to keep your assumptions in mind...

PRE-Home Visit Attitude Scale

Name of Family: __________________

1. Family is knowledgeable about child’s disability.  
   - Agree  - Disagree

2. Family believes education is important for their child & encourage them to do their best in school.  
   - Agree  - Disagree

3. Family uses positive reinforcement and consistent discipline in the home.  
   - Agree  - Disagree

4. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.  
   - Agree  - Disagree
How has your attitude changed since you visited the family in their home?

**POST-Home Visit Attitude Scale**

Name of Family: __________________

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<thead>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family is knowledgeable about child's disability.</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family believes education is important for their child &amp; encourage them to do their best in school.</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Family uses positive reinforcement and consistent discipline in the home.</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family would like to be more involved in school activities.</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
<td>![Smiley Face] ![Sad Face]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Hi, Mr/Ms ____________.
This is ______________, ______________teacher.

How are you today?
I’m calling because as you know, Vineland is a home visit school. We have found that home visits are a great way of getting to know the parents of our students. We also want to give parents a chance to get to know us better too!

I was hoping you’d allow me to visit your home so that I can get to know you & __________ better.
It’s a short visit that will not take more than 45 minutes. I usually make my home visits on Friday afternoons. Is there a time in the next couple of weeks that would be good for you?
Okay, I’ll call you the day before to confirm.

See you then!

Remember!
If you are bringing a partner with you to the home visit, ask the parent first & then remind them when you call to confirm the day before the visit. Nothing surprises parents more than extra people showing up on their doorstep!
Sample Script for Phone Calls to Parents  
(November Conferences, Visit #2)

Hi, Mr./Ms ___________.
This is ____________, ____________teacher.

How are you today?
I’m calling because the first trimester has finished and it’s time for parent/teacher conferences. Here at Vineland, we do home visits instead of having parents come to the school.

I am really looking forward to sharing ____________’s progress so far this year with you. We will be making our home visits on Thursday and Friday of next week. Is there a time that you would prefer I come to your home?
Okay, I’ll call you the day before to confirm.

See you then!
Adapted from the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Program

Remember!
When discussing student’s progress with parents, bring tools that parents can use in the home to support their child’s learning at school.
There will likely be several occasions when you will need to bring an interpreter with you on a home visit. Here are some tips for working with Interpreters:

1) Find out the style of your interpreter prior to making any visits with them.
   What is their style of translation? Simultaneous or Consecutive? For example, do they use a literal word-for-word style, or do they like to hear a portion of the information and then summarize? Pace yourself to match the style of your translator.

2) Sit across from the parent with the interpreter next to you.
   This allows you to maintain eye contact with the parent while you are speaking as well as while they are speaking.

3) Speak directly to the parent – not to the translator!
   The parent is the one you are trying to build a relationship with.

4) When the parent is speaking, look at them to show that you are interested.
   After you receive the translation, pose any questions directly back to the parent.

5) Avoid yes/no questions & the use of slang.
I know you said not to have an agenda for my home visits but what if I need some structure to keep in mind in case the conversation falters?

In that case, here are a few ideas...

Home Visit #1 (Aug./Sept.)

- How long has your family lived in this neighborhood?
- What does your child like to do after school & on weekends?
- What expectations do you have of me, your child’s teacher?
- What are your goals for your child this year?
- What are your hopes & dreams for your child for the future? (be cautious with this question! many parents are still grieving for the loss of the child they thought they were going to have & may not be ready to think about the future!)
- Does your child have any special toys or friends that he/she plays with?
- Is there anything you want me to know about your child?

Home Visit #2 (Oct./Nov.)

- Your child has been working really hard on ______.
- One area your child needs to work more on is ______.
- I brought some tools that you can use here at home to support ______’s learning.

Let the conversation flow naturally!
Remember, you are there to LISTEN!
Here are some tips for Active Listening:

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they are saying.

1. Pay attention
   • Give the speaker your undivided attention & acknowledge the message
   • Recognize that what is not said also speaks loudly
   • Look at the speaker directly
   • Put aside distracting thoughts. Don’t mentally prepare a rebuttal!
   • Avoid being distracted by environmental factors
   • "Listen" to the speaker’s body language

2. Show that you are listening
   • Use your own body language & gestures to convey your attention
   • Nod occasionally, smile & use other facial expressions
   • Note your posture & make sure it is open & inviting
   • Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like “yes”, & “uh huh”

3. Provide feedback
   • Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, & beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said & ask questions
   • Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I’m hearing is..." & "Sounds like you are saying..." are great ways to reflect back
   • Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say...", "Is this what you mean?"
   • Summarize the speaker’s comments periodically

4. Defer judgment
   • Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker & limits full understanding of the message
   • Allow the speaker to finish
   • Don’t interrupt with counter-arguments

5. Respond Appropriately
   • Active listening is a model for respect & understanding
   • Be candid, open, & honest in your response
   • Assert your opinions respectfully
Home Visit #1
The "Hopes & Dreams" Question

As a part of getting to know the family, many home visitors like to ask families what their hopes and dreams are for their child. Here are a few things to think about before you ask the question, "What are your hopes & dreams for your child?"

1. How do you think the parent will react to this question?
2. How recently was the child diagnosed with a disability?
3. Are the parents knowledgeable about their child’s disability or are they still learning?
4. Will asking this question bring up feelings of grief?

There are many different ways that families may react to being asked about their hopes & dreams for their child:

- some parents may be eager to answer
- some parents may not have considered that far into the future
- many parents may have never been asked this question
- some families are still dealing with the day-to-day reality of their child’s disability and therefore haven’t thought about the future
- some parents’ emotions are still so raw that they will become upset if you ask them about their hopes & dreams for their child

* BEFORE you ask this question, THINK about whether or not the parent is ready to be asked...
Home Visit #1 Welcome Kit Ideas

Below are some ideas for items you can put in your welcome kits you bring for your students. You can include as few or as many as you wish! I like to put my welcome kits in a small backpack or in a canvass tote bag that I personalize with the child’s name.

* crayons, washable markers, colored pencils, etc.
* universal, blunt, safety scissors
* simple coloring book
* bottle of non-toxic white glue or glue stick
* blank pad of paper for drawing
* pencils
* erasers
* pencil sharpener
* ruler
* preschool flash cards (letters, colors, shapes, numbers, etc.)
* stickers
* small pots of non-toxic playdoh
* white board & white board markers
* large lined paper or journal
* board book or other simple children’s book
* simple inset puzzles
* large sized wooden beads and string
* small bottle of bubbles
* large pieces of chalk
* counting & sorting manipulatives
* CD with songs from school

Many of these items can be purchased for very little at $1.00 stores.
Home Visit #2 Tool Kit Ideas

Below are some ideas for tools you can bring to the families of your students. But don’t just stick to these ideas! You know your students best! Mix it up & come up with your own!

Pre-Academic
- matching folders (numbers, letters, pictures, shapes, colors, etc.)
- flash cards (vocabulary, letters, numbers, shapes, colors, etc.)
- numbers with touch points

Sensory
- fiddle toys
- chewy tubes, therapeutic brush (provide protocol & demonstration)
- list of sensory activities child enjoys at school (be specific!)

Communication
- communication boards & books with picture icons representing favored items & activities
- picture icons created with Boardmaker or other programs
- list of activities for improving oral motor skills

Adaptive Skills
- visual work systems for completing toilet and hygiene routines
- visual schedules with picture icons representing family activities
- portable visual schedules to take in the car

Fine Motor/Gross Motor
- clothes peg activities
- playdoh & accessories (plastic knives, cookie cutters, rolling pins, etc.)
- portable visual schedule for going to the park

Social/Emotional
- “First……, Then…..” contingencies or “I am working for…..” boards
- social stories (topics are ENDLESS!)
But I can’t afford to buy all of these tools for parents!!

Of course you can’t! And no one expects you to! Below is a list of possible resources you can access to purchase welcome bags & tool kit materials for your students:

• www.DonorsChoose.org
  - Donors Choose is an online charity where teachers can write proposals for materials they need in their classrooms

• Title 1
  - talk to your site administrator about accessing your school’s Title 1 funds; these funds are meant to be spent in support of parent involvement!

• Project DREAM
  - a private non-profit that supports enrichment activities in the schools and communities within TRUSD. DREAM helps our schools and local non-profits pay for the programs that cannot be paid for out of state or federal funds
  - visit their website at www.dreamtwinrivers.com

• Resource Area For Teachers (RAFT)
  - RAFT is a non-profit that takes donations of surplus goods from industry partners and re-purposes them for use by teachers in the classroom; their prices are dirt cheap & the school district has already supplied us with membership to RAFT as well as a $100.00 gift card for purchases

• Local Church Groups & Clubs
  - more than likely, one of the parents of one of your students is a member of the Lion’s Club, the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, or other community minded clubs; church groups are also often willing to support their local schools especially when it comes to building relationships with families; plan to speak at a local club or church event & tell them about our school’s home visit program. They might be willing to help!
Customize these pages to suit you!
Print, laminate & glue on magnet! Give to parents!

Vineland Preschool
Vineland Preschool  566-1980
Fax number            566-1790
Your Name              
Your Emailaddress@twinriversusd.org

Vineland Preschool
Vineland Preschool  566-1980
Fax number            566-1790
Your Name              
Your Emailaddress@twinriversusd.org

Vineland Preschool
Vineland Preschool  566-1980
Fax number            566-1790
Your Name              
Your Emailaddress@twinriversusd.org
And here it is in Spanish...

Vineland Preschool
Oficina de la escuela  566-1980
Número Fax  566-1790
Email de Your Name
Your Emailaddress@twinriversusd.org
There are a few things to look for during your visit. Because we work with children with special needs, it is vital that we help them generalize skills from one environment to the next. Use your observation skills during a home visit to determine if your student is doing anything at home that they're not doing at school & vice versa.

If you see your student doing something during a home visit that they're not doing at school, make note of it on your reflection sheet under one of these headings. This is important information that you can use in the classroom and may help the student to generalize their skills across different environments!
Here is a sample of some tools you can use once you've made your visit to document what you learned...

Post-Home Visit Notes
(Do not take notes during the visit!!)

Name of student: ______Sarah K._____________

Date of Visit: ___10/10/10___________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Members Present</th>
<th>Child's Likes &amp; Dislikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer (Mom)</td>
<td>Loves dogs, Teletubbies, fruit, swinging &amp; playing in water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (Dad)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina (baby sister)</td>
<td>Dislikes brushing her teeth, being touched, eating her vegetables &amp; loud noises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fido (Dog – cocker spaniel)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Members Absent

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven (older brother)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hopes & Dreams

Parents would like Sarah to learn to ride a bike, brush her teeth without having a tantrum & go to Kindergarten at her home school

Items To Follow Up On

Parents would like to visit the school prior to the first day so that Sarah can get accustomed to the classroom. Call parents to set up a day/time to visit. 555-555-5555
Post-Home Visit Reflections
(reflect on the visit & what you learned about the child & their family)

Name of Child: ___Sarah K.____

How can I use the information I learned to support learning in the classroom?
In talking with Sarah’s parents & spending time with her it became clear that Sarah is very attached to her family. She never left their side – if they left the room, she went with them. It may be difficult for Sarah to make the transition away from her parents that first day of school & maybe for several days afterwards. Mom & Dad are very supportive & know how important school is for Sarah. They are eager to see her blossom & become more self-confident. Mom & Dad have agreed that Dad will drop Sarah off in the mornings because she has a harder time separating from mom.

Long term goal is for Sarah to go to Kindergarten at her home school. We will focus on helping Sarah follow simple directions, participate in a group setting, & learn those important pre-kindergarten skills like numbers, letters, etc.

Keep in mind Sarah doesn’t like to be touched; positioning her within group but with only 1 child on 1 side is best – walking in line, she should be at front of line or back of line. Using a sensory diet of brushing, compressions & swinging may help decrease her sensitivity to touch.

Sarah loves Teletubbies. Use as reinforcer! Must find my Teletubbies CD, puppets, & books in the storage closet!
Possible IEP goals include brushing teeth, riding trike, tolerating sitting in groups with other children around her.
**Post-Home Visit Classroom Information Sheet**

**Name of Child:** _____Sarah K.____

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communication</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sensory</strong></th>
<th><strong>Adaptive Skills</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>single words (poor articulation)</td>
<td>does not like to be touched</td>
<td>wears diapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has never used PECS; uses gestures</td>
<td>covers ears to loud sounds</td>
<td>can help with dressing &amp; undressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brings people to things</td>
<td>tantrums during teeth brushing routine</td>
<td>difficult time washing hands – likes to play in water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pre-Academic Skills</strong></th>
<th><strong>Gross Motor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Play Skills</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>knows letters of name</td>
<td>learning to ride tricycle</td>
<td>likes Teletubbies &amp; books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sings familiar songs</td>
<td>throws balls</td>
<td>no pretend play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counts to 3</td>
<td>runs w/out falling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Health</strong></th>
<th><strong>Fine Motor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social/Emotional</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no allergies/meds</td>
<td>scribbles on paper using fisted grasp</td>
<td>pushes people away if too close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picky eater</td>
<td></td>
<td>squeals &amp; cries when can’t have something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aloof in groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-Home Visit Notes
(Do not take notes during the visit!!)

Name of student: __________________________________________

Date of Visit: ______________________

<table>
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<th>Items To Follow Up On</th>
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Post-Home Visit Reflections
(reflect on the visit & what you learned about the child & their family)

Name of Child: ______________

How can I use the information I learned to support learning in the classroom?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Post-Home Visit Classroom Information Sheet

Name of Child: ________________

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</tbody>
</table>
What do I do if the parent doesn’t want me to come to their home? How do I get them involved in their child’s education?

There are lots of other ways for parents to be involved in their child’s education. Joyce Epstein, a researcher in the field of parent involvement for more than 20 years has some suggestions:

**Epstein’s Model for Parental Involvement**

- **Parenting.** Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child & adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age & grade level. Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, & goals for children.

- **Communicating.** Communicate with families about school programs & student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school & home.

- **Volunteering.** Improve recruitment, training, activities, & schedules to involve families as volunteers & as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students & the school.

- **Learning at Home.** Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, & other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share & discuss interesting tasks.

- **Decision-Making.** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, & advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, & parent organizations.

- **Collaborating with the Community.** Coordinate resources & services for families, students, & the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural & civic organizations, & colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Taken from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2nd edition)
I’d like to learn more about home visits!

That’s great! Here are some resources about home visits & parent involvement in general:

- Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project
  www.pthvp.org

- Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships
  by Anne T. Henderson, et al.

- School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action
  by Joyce Epstein, et al.

- National PTA
  www.njpirc.org

- A Guide to Home Visits
  by The Michigan Department of Education

There are lots of resources available on the Internet. Many states across the country are using home visits as a way to build relationships with families. Google it!
REFERENCES


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