THE EFFICACIES OF HOME VISITS: A STUDY IN MRS. GARCIA’S 3RD GRADE CLASSROOM AT TAHOE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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THE EFFICACIES OF HOME VISITS: A STUDY IN MRS. GARCIA’S 3RD GRADE CLASSROOM AT TAHOE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

of

THE EFFICACIES OF HOME VISITS: A STUDY IN MRS. GARCIA’S 3RD
GRADE CLASSROOM AT TAHOE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacies of home visits in
Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom at Tahoe Elementary School. Specifically, answers
to the following research questions were sought:

• Do the families feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
• Do the students feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
• How did the families and their children react to the home visits?
• What effect did the home visits have on the parent teacher communication
  throughout the school year?

Sources of Data

The population used for this study consisted of the students and their families
in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom, Mrs. Garcia herself, and the principal, Ms.
Curry, at Tahoe Elementary School. Data was collected through the use of
questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The responses represented the opinions of those students and their parents in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom. The data collected was reviewed and analysed by the researcher. All of this information was documented and formulated into an organized group of data to complete this study.

Conclusions Reached

The researcher concludes that the students and their families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom, Mrs. Garcia herself, and the principal at Tahoe Elementary School, are all advocates of home visits. All of the subjects agreed that the outcomes of home visits were positive and beneficial to not only the students but their families as well. The communication between the student, their families and the teacher increased due to the home visits. Many of the students’ confidence in school increased as well, both socially and academically.

__________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Daniel Orey

__________________________
Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great deal to the students and their families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom, Mrs. Garcia herself, and the administration at Tahoe Elementary School for being so cooperative with me throughout the school year. Were it not for their time and effort, I would not have the valuable data necessary for this study.

I owe even more to my wife, Kyrsten, and my loving parents for supporting me in my endeavors throughout the years. Thank you for being there every step of the way and giving me the strength and support to complete this chapter of my life.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

How can the home, school and community work together to encourage and support student learning and academic success? That is the question that our society has been trying to answer for decades. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family and Community, stated in an interview,

All of our research and the work of hundreds of educators in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) show that parents and teachers really want better ways to communicate about what children are learning and how parents can help students succeed in school. (2004, p. 2)

Opening the lines of communication with the students’ families and discussing how they can help the student succeed is imperative. One way to do this is through home visits conducted by the teacher.

Home visits are rather simple. Rather than blaming each other, teachers and families come together, in a unique setting, as equal partners, to build trust and form a relationship where they can take the time to share dreams, expectations, experiences, and tools regarding the child’s academic success. Once a relationship is formed, the partners are empowered, finding accountability with each other to make the necessary changes to insure that students experience academic and social success (Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project-SCUSD).
Home visits are not a new concept. In the seventies, home visit programs began and were fueled by the idea that fewer families were coming into the schools and that the schools should venture to the families. Many head start programs began to utilize the concept and conduct home visits. They began to see positive results with this type of outreach and home visits became popular. This led educators to conduct home visits but the pattern became only to venture into the home when there was a problem or a transition from one school to another.

Established home visit programs are much more elaborate than that. Specifically, The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento, visits the student’s home or establishment generally before the school year even starts. The educators, mainly the teachers, do not wait for there to be an issue. They visit every student’s home or establishment. They believe all students should be visited because targeting challenging students will only perpetuate the cycles of mistrust.

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project conducts a minimum of two home visits within a school year per child. The first fall visit is focused on building relationships with the families and listening to them. Throughout the winter there is continuous school outreach and a second home visit is conducted in the spring. The second home visit is focused on capacity building and sharing information.

The educators involved in The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project are compensated for their time. They receive funds from the Nell Soto grant. The grant awards pay for teacher training and participation in the home visit program. Funds
may also be used to defray other costs associated with implementation of the program. Programs throughout the country receive funding from the Nell Soto grant.

During a home visit, educators can build trust and rapport with parents and families. Educators can also provide information about how the school works and how the year is going to go inside the classroom. If parents are reluctant to come to school, a home visit can be the critical link, and often leads to more participation at home and at school (Davies, Henderson, Johnson, & Mapp, 2007).

Educators cannot assume that parents will call or come into the classroom if they feel there is a problem or they have a concern. They should not expect that every parent will come to the school and say, “How can I help my child?” Many families do not communicate with their children’s school because they feel intimidated whether it is because of a previous negative experience or because they feel inferior. Educators cannot assume that that means they do not want the best for their child. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) argued:

I believe that all parents hold big expectations for the role they will play in the life chances for their children. They all harbor a large wish list of dreams and aspirations for their youngsters. All families care deeply about their children’s education and hope that their progeny will be happier, more productive, and more successful than they have been in their lives. (p. 36)

If the belief is that families ultimately do care then we have to assume they do not understand the importance of their role in the educational system. Many couples do not have the luxury of having a stay at home parent because of the financial
concerns. Parents are divorcing at a much higher rate than they were 30 years ago and students are feeling the consequences. What families seem to not understand specifically is that parents and teachers are equally important co-educators given that the parent is the expert on the individual child while the teacher is the expert on the curriculum that must be mastered for success.

Do educators know what type of conditions their students are living in if they do not visit the home? Some people would argue yes but ultimately the way to find out is by conducting home visits. They make educators more aware of the resources the home provides. Making it to school after traveling ninety miles is the child’s concern, not whether or not they have a pencil. What if the teacher did not know the student had just traveled ninety miles to get to school? Principal Tresia Swain of Rowan County Middle School, who started a home visit program at her school in the Midwest, explained, “Once the teachers see the environment some of our kids live in, they no longer complain that the child didn’t bring a pencil and paper to class and they then work harder to see these kids are successful” (Yeats, 2007, p. 30).

Since relationships are building blocks of effective teaching and student success, school educators, administrators, parents and students need to work collaboratively. Effective partnerships can be fostered when a commitment is made to these important relationships among all the stakeholders (Witmer, 2005). Teachers clearly need to form those relationships and conducting home visits is the perfect way to get started.
Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacies of the home visits conducted by Mrs. Garcia in her third grade classroom. It is hypothesized that the outcomes or efficacies will be positive and will have a sizable effect on the families involved. This study on home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s third grade classroom will examine the following research questions:

- Do the families feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- Do the students feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- How did the families and their children react to the home visits?
- What effect did the home visits have on the parent teacher communication throughout the school year?

Significance of the Study

Many educators are aware that home visits are conducted by schools all over the country but they have not bought into the idea of home visits enough to conduct them themselves in their own classrooms or school. There is a need for more research on home visits and their outcomes. With a changing society now is the time that home visits are most important. Educators need to see the efficacies home visits have on the student, their families and the classroom as a whole. Hopefully this study will provide the information people need to step up and be an advocate for home visits and start a home visit program at their school.

Convincing educators of anything can be a daunting task. The hope is that the information provided from this study will add to the evidence of why home visits are
beneficial not only to the teacher but to the students and their families. By looking at the efficacies from the point of view of the student, their family, the teacher and the principal, educators can receive the full picture. They tend to want to know why they should do something. How does it benefit them? They want to know a way to make the school year easier and conducting home visits may be their key.

This study is not just geared at educators. In addition to educators, this study is for the students and their families. There needs to be evidence for families to see why home visits are conducted and why they are important. Many educators who do conduct home visits have mentioned that families who have never had a home visit before are hesitant. They tend to think there is an underlying, perhaps negative, reason for the teacher or administrator to be entering their home. That is rarely ever the case especially when a teacher is part of a home visit program. Educators are in their profession for the kids. They want what is best for them and if home visits will aid in finding what is best then they will do it.

Methodology

This study was implemented at Tahoe Elementary School to determine the efficacies of home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom from the viewpoint of the student, their family, the teacher and the principal. These variables were analyzed through the use of data collected by questionnaires and interviews. The student and their families were given the option to participate and 38% decided to do so.
Tahoe Elementary School is located in the Tahoe Park neighborhood in Sacramento and is a part of the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). There are currently grades kindergarten through sixth grade with approximately 390 students and approximately 21 credentialed teachers. Tahoe Elementary School has a rich diversity and most families fall within the low income bracket. The school's three largest student populations are Latino, Caucasian and African American.

Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. A questionnaire was sent out to all the families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom before the home visits were conducted. A second questionnaire was supposed to be sent out after the home visits were conducted but due to the lack of participation a second questionnaire was never given. Instead more in-depth interviews were conducted with a handful of families who did decide to participate. After the home visits, the students who were able to participate filled out a questionnaire as well as the teacher, Mrs. Garcia and the principal, Ms. Curry.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

*Cultural Blindness*: Not recognizing one’s culture and treating everybody as if they were all the same inside a classroom.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*: An act that is an extensive statute which funds primary and secondary education, while explicitly forbidding the establishment of a national curriculum. As mandated in the Act, the funds are
authorized for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion. (Enacted April 11, 1965)

English Learners (EL) – Students who are learning English for the first time who receive specialized instruction.

**Ethnographic Perspective**: A branch within sociology. It is a methodological strategy used to provide descriptions of human societies, which as a methodology does not prescribe any particular method (e.g. observation, interview, questionnaire), but instead prescribes the nature of the study (i.e. to describe people through writing). In the biological sciences, this type of study might be called a "field study" or a "case report," both of which are used as common synonyms for "ethnography".

**Ghetto**: A usually poor section of a city inhabited primarily by people of the same race, religion, or social background, often because of discrimination.

**Head Start**: A program that provides comprehensive development services for America’s low income, pre-school children, ages three to five as well as social services for their families. Specific services for children focus on education, socio-emotional development, physical and mental health, and nutrition. The program is operated through many types of organizations, school districts, local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, childcare providers, tribal organizations and community colleges.

**Home visit**: An event where an educator, whether it be the teacher or an administrator, visits the home or establishment of a student within their district.
Immigrant Parent Partnership Program (IPPP): A group formed of immigrant families that foster partnerships among schools, parents and community stakeholders.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The Los Angeles Unified School District, located in Los Angeles, California believe in the equal worth and dignity of all students and are committed to educate all students to their maximum potential.

Low-achieving. Student’s who make limited progress because of limited ability or readiness rather than motivation problems.

Low-income: A household income at or below the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.

National Association for Partners in Education (NAPE): An organization to provide leadership in the formation and growth of effective partnerships that ensure success for all students. They are an objective voice in developing school volunteer, intergenerational, community service, and business partnership programs throughout the United States.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE): An organization to advocate the involvement of parents and families in their children’s education, and to foster relationships between home, school, and community to enhance the education of all our nation’s young people.

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS): An organization that invites schools, districts, states, and organizations to join together and use research-based
approaches to organize and sustain excellent programs of family and community involvement that will increase student success in school.

*Nell Soto Parent/Teacher Involvement Program Grant*: The grant was established in 1999 and funds teacher home visits and neighborhood community meetings as a way of strengthening home-school communication and improving student achievement.

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*: An Act that is the latest federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (enacted January 8, 2002).

*Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)*: A nine week institution where parent involvement training classes from 1,500 elementary, middle and high schools in districts within California are held.

*Parent involvement*. The parent’s involvement with the school and their children’s education process. Parents can support their children’s schooling by attending school functions and responding to school obligations. They can become more involved in helping their children improve their school work and provide encouragement.

*Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project*: Any extraordinary partnership between a faith based community organizing group, a local teachers union and a school district began in 1998 as an effort to address the cycle of blame that exists between parents and the site personnel at several Sacramento schools where there was a pervasive
history of low student achievement, high levels of poverty, and where high
percentages of children entered school as English Learners.

_Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):_ The Sacramento City
Unified School District, located in Sacramento, California, provides all students the
knowledge, skills, and educational opportunities to achieve high academic standards
and be successful in a changing global society.

_Stakeholders:_ A person (or group) that has an interest in the activities of an
institution or organization.

_Title 1 School:_ To improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged.
The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant
opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency
on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.

Limitations of the Study

There are various limitations in this study. Sixteen students and their parents
participated in the home visits with Mrs. Garcia in her 3rd grade classroom and
unfortunately only six decided to participate. This limits the available information and
did not allow for a strong research base for this study. The questionnaires that the
families filled out are limited in scope because they are only one page single sided.

The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacies of these home visits on
the teacher, the principal, students and their families. As the sample size is not
significant, the findings cannot be generalized. The study is not meant to portray the
views of other classrooms, schools or individuals.
Organization of the Study

The organization of this project is as follows: Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research and how it is organized. Chapter 2 consists of an overview of the literature surrounding home visits, more specifically the effects they have on the student and their families. Chapter 3 contains a presentation of the data that was compiled throughout the research of this study. Chapter 4 analyzes and interprets the data that was collected from the questionnaires and interviews. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, the conclusion drawn from the analysis, proposed recommendations and further consideration. The Appendix provides the consent form, questionnaires and interview questions used throughout the study.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature will focus on research that illustrates the effects of home visits conducted by the teacher on the student, their families and the classroom as a whole. The research will cover the significance of parent involvement, home/school communication and their link to home visits. It will also discuss parent involvement with in the Latino community and their benefits. Bridging the communication gap between home and school can contribute to behavior changes, gained respect and ultimately academic success. It is suggested that teachers should familiarize themselves with their students’ communities, getting to know the students’ families, their culture and finding out what parents’ aspirations are for their children. Home visits give teachers a unique opportunity to answer many of these looming questions and accomplish these goals.

The recent legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has put parent involvement at the forefront of national policy. The law requires school districts who receive federal funds to inform parents how they can be involved in their children’s schools and requires school districts to disseminate an annual district report card to parents. This has encouraged many school districts across the United States to reconsider their current parent involvement programs to ensure they are compliant in order to continue to receive federal aid through various programs. Just as children
Parent involvement goes beyond parent teacher conferences, back to school night and open house. It involves becoming a part of the school, helping in decision making and their children’s education process. Parents can support their children’s schooling by attending school functions and responding to school obligations. They can become more involved in helping their children improve their school work and provide encouragement. Teachers also have a major role in encouraging parent involvement and making all families feel welcome in their classroom.

Joyce Epstein has been researching ways to improve parent and community involvement in schools for decades. Epstein (2004) stated, “My colleagues and I have been conducting studies to understand how the home, school and community can work together to encourage and support student learning and development from preschool through elementary, middle school and high school” (p. 1). As a result, Epstein developed a framework to help educators and guide partnerships in the right direction. The framework, focusing on six types of parent involvement, has become popular among schools across the United States.

The six types of involvement recognize there are different ways for family and community members to be a part of the child’s learning and success. Involvement can be at home, in the classroom or in the community. Epstein compiled these six types of
involvement to focus partnerships on school improvement goals and to strengthen school and family relationships. By implementing activities for all six types of involvement, schools can help parents become involved at school and at home in various ways that meet student’s needs and family schedules (Brandt, 1989). Her work also describes the challenges inherent in fostering each type of parent involvement as well as the expected results of implementing them for students, parents and teachers. Epstein’s six types of involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community.

Along with Epstein, there are a number of groups to encourage parent involvement in schools. Two major groups are the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) and the National Association for Partners in Education (NAPE). Both of these organizations are advocates for parent involvement and consist of parent organizations and national education organizations representing teachers and administrators (National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, 2010).

NCPIE focuses on recognizing that there is no one size fits all answer to partnerships. They recommend identifying with families the strengths, interests and needs of the families, students, and school staff and work from there. They focus heavily on community involvement and suggest recognizing how a community’s historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resources can generate interest in family-community participation (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2010).
Home, school and community involvement is significant in student learning and academic success. According to Epstein (2002), “The bottom line for many educators is to increase student motivation, achievement and success in school” (p. 5). The problem is that schools can not do this alone. Parents and teachers share responsibility for a child’s education so naturally there should be a partnership or alliance between the two. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. That is why Epstein continues her research on the topic and explains:

Seventy-five percent of parents would like to become more effective partners with their children’s schools. The percentages very somewhat from school to school, but the pattern is the same, with most parents at all grade levels wanting and needing information and guidance from their children’s schools and teachers. All schools have the opportunity to build strong partnerships with parents. (p. 6)

A major drawback to increasing involvement between home and school is the commitment of school leaders. Their role is vital in making that strong connection and encouraging teachers to participate in implemented programs. Administrators have to believe that family involvement can happen, even in what is termed “ghetto” schools, and understand that low-income parents are also devoted parents, hard working, trusting, compassionate and very open (Auerbach, 2009). Many parents are just waiting for programs to be offered to them and are very open to change. It is up to the school to make the first step.
The question many administrators ask is how they seek out, recognize, or create opportunities to lead for family involvement, thereby taking a proactive role? The first step in answering that question is finding a staff that is supportive and willing to work with school leaders and the families to form meaningful relationships. A major barrier is teachers who do not welcome parents into their classroom and are resistant. Auerbach (2009) found that positive word of mouth from colleagues could help erode teacher resistance over time.

Ultimately, educators and administrators must be knowledgeable of parent involvement practices in order to create successful partnerships with families. Teacher preparation programs must reform their courses and integrate field experiences and internships to enhance pre-service teachers’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills regarding school-family community partnerships. It seems parent involvement coursework and professional experiences for educators to learn how to facilitate this involvement are scarce. When courses are offered they typically only emphasize traditional forms of parent involvement, such as conferencing.

Schools must recognize and respect family’s cultural and socioeconomic differences. Events and activities conducted by the school must be scheduled and structured to fit the family’s needs. For example schools may need to provide transportation and child care to help families become involved. Recognizing these needs may welcome and encourage their involvement more frequently. This may lead the families to perceive the school in a different light and in turn, the family may provide more parent involvement with their children at home. Teachers suggest that
even the brief amount of time that parents spend on home learning activities with their children can be quite beneficial if the time is spent wisely (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Engaging Latino Families in Involvement

A significant number of families in California are Latino and speak Spanish as their primary language in the home. In some cases the parents and family only speak Spanish and have little or no means of communicating with schools. How do schools and the community bridge that cultural divide?

A study was conducted in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) with three Latino principals where 90% of their student population was Latino and all three schools were low-achieving (Auerbach, 2009). The data for this study was collected mainly through interviews and some additional data was collected parent-related documents such as school newsletters, web sites, press releases, and program materials. At the time of the data collection LAUSD had a number of structures and positions in place to promote parent involvement.

The data collected gave administrators a better understanding of how to implement parent involvement programs and take that first step to bridge the communication gap. It was made clear that bridging the gap goes beyond a principal speaking English or ensuring the parents’ home languages were accommodated by the school. The families needed to feel empowered and know their role within the school. The study theorized that the strongest predicator of parent involvement was how parents conceptualized and constructed their role, that is, what they think and do
regarding their responsibility to support education (Auerbach, 2009). Perez, one of the principals who participated in the study, described parents as, “the heartbeat of the school”. She noted that she loves working with parents and has a lot in common with them and realizes more and more each day that they want to learn (Auerbach).

Another administrator described the connection with families as making contact at the human level. It was theorized that perhaps a school culture supporting bilingualism sets the stage for better home-school relations when most parents are not fluent in English.

Another study conducted by Chrispeel and Rivero (2001) focusing on Latino families asked this question ‘How do Latino parents define their role and perceive their place in their children’s education and their relationship with the school?’ A number of Latino parents attended school in Mexico and held assumptions and expectations based on their own schooling experiences. Are these experiences the same in Mexico as they are in the United States? The assumption was no and that these parents perspectives has not been heard or understood. The families saw their essential role as ensuring that their children had food, clothing, and shelter and that they were socialized in to the norms and expectations of the family (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 35). The purpose of this study was to explore the effect on immigrant parent’s sense of place in their children’s education when they were afforded the opportunity to learn about the American educational system through a series of eight parent education classes offered by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) (Chrispeels & Rivero).
The principles of PIQE are that parents need information about the educational system, how to interact with the school and teachers and how to help their children at home. The program consists of eight 90 minute sessions which are all translated into Spanish for those parents who need it. The lessons are a scripted curriculum to ensure everyone is receiving the same material and they are accommodating to the parent’s schedules to make certain everyone has the opportunity to participate.

In this study, Chrispeel and Rivero (2001) took an ethnographic perspective to examine a part of the parent’s lives and cultural practices. By taking this perspective they were able explore the everyday lives of the parents, their roles, relationships, rights and obligations in regards to their children’s education. They used this perspective as a tool to look old issues within education in new ways. Once the parents who participated gained new information at the PIQE classes they tried to fulfill these roles at home and at school. The shift was on the parent’s side not the school side. Just the fact that these parents participated in these classes was a strong indicator of the parent’s aspirations for better futures for their children. The findings suggest that after attending the program parents had expanded their concepts of involvement in their child’s education both at home and at school (Chrispeel & Rivero, p.161).

Networking for parents, especially immigrant parents who tend to stay within their own community, is also critically important because it makes the parents feel more comfortable in the school setting. A program titled the Immigrant Parent Partnership Program did just that. It supported the immigrant parents by offering leadership classes, multiple-language programs and teacher action research to increase
teacher understanding of immigrant parents, and the creation of a parent resource center (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009).

In July of 2005, 24 doctoral students from the University of Washington, mostly principals studying their leadership in learning to be a superintendent program, set out to help educational leaders listen to and learn from underrepresented voices. These students went on a summer learning experience and visited the homes of racially diverse families including Latino’s. Many of the principals had conducted home visits before but this was the first time they had done so with the primary purpose of listening to underrepresented voices. Doing this helped students challenge assumptions regarding equitable communication and cultural awareness (Cobbs & Ginsberg, 2006).

The leadership students had the support of interpreters from the Seattle School District. They went along with the students to conduct the home visits which lasted approximately two hours. The students noticed that scheduling the home visits was a challenge within itself. It reflected the complicated schedules of the families they were serving.

This experience influenced the students in several ways and eight themes surfaced throughout their visits. They were:

1. Interpreters, as mediators of language and culture, are essential.
2. Home visits can help educators become aware of how much we do not know, even when we think we do, about the families we serve.
3. Written communication, even when it is translated, can fail to reach a large number of people, especially in linguistic groups steeped in rich oral tradition.

4. Families are more than willing to welcome and interact with educators in their homes.

5. There is commitment and passion among families who are new to the United States.

6. There seems to be a willingness to accept that school officials will make decisions that are in all children’s interests.

7. Educational leaders play a critical role in ensuring that participation in policy-making involves everyone.

8. Listening to stories is a challenge for system-level leaders (Cobbs & Ginsberg, 2006).

This experience gave a powerful reminder to the community about communication. Assumptions need to be examined and there is always a responsibility to ask whose interests are being served.

Home Visits

Home visits are a very simple idea. They are an event where an educator, whether it is the teacher or an administrator, visit the home or establishment of a student within the district. For the purpose of this study it is the teacher visiting the home or establishment of her students. Instead of everyone blaming each other for the failure of the educational system, parents and schools have bonded together and in
many cases are hoping to make a change. They want to raise student achievement and they are hoping home visits will help that happen.

Epstein suggests conducting home visits as a mean of enhancing communication between the home and the school. Home visits are included in type one of her framework. Epstein’s framework has become popular among educators, but is not utilized enough.

There are many positive outcomes that occur after conducting home visits which aid in raising student’s academic success. To list a few, home visits help educators build a positive relationship with the student and their family, open the line of communication between the family and the teacher, help the teachers become more aware of the resources that are available to their students at home, become more aware of the life issues that the student may face on a daily basis, learn more about the student’s culture and be able to bring it back into the classroom, and discuss short and long term goals with the student and their family. All of these actions may result positive outcomes which may benefit the student, their family, and the teacher throughout the year.

A study was conducted in a rural Midwestern school district that examined teacher’s perceptions of the benefits of home visits in relation to children’s success in school from kindergarten to second grade. Results of this study suggested that the benefit of home visits is a means of strengthening home school partnerships. Specifically the authors reported that teacher’s perceived that home visits resulted in more positive relationships with the children and their families. Furthermore, the
teacher’s believed that the visits led to improved communication with the parents, better understanding of the child, and better understanding of the impact of the child’s home environment as it related to school performance (Mann & Meyer, 2006).

One key to a child’s school success is the relationship established between the teacher and student, and the teacher and the student’s family. Home visits offer a good way to develop these relationships in a safe territory. Research has shown that one of the keys to successful teaching and schooling is creating personal connections with students inside and outside of school (Epstein, 1998). Knowing the students, family, outside interests and home routines, and then using this information to connect meaningful ways can have huge rewards in helping to construct happier, healthier, and smarter kids. Richard Steinberg, a principal at South Fork Middle School, visits the students from his school at their homes each summer. He explains, “I have found that the home visits make a huge difference in how well I understand my students, their families, and their problems. The home visits have been extremely well received” (Sternberg, 2006, p. 36).

Karen Kalish, president of the Estelle W. and Karen S. Kalish Foundation, works with teachers from St Louis to Springfield Massachusetts to help them leave their classrooms and enter the homes of their students. Many are fearful because they will be entering a place where parents and families hold the most authority. Recently they called upon Kalish to train them on how to conduct home visits in the hopes that they would build stronger partnerships, inevitably increasing student achievement. In the St. Louis schools test score data is beginning to show that students whose families
participated in home visits are doing better in school (Richards, 2009). In St. Louis Kalish is putting about $55,000 a year from her foundation towards the Home Visit Program. Her program requires that teachers pair up and conduct two home visits a year per student. Kalish expresses:

If you have kids going from basic to proficient or advanced, if you have more kids staying on grade level and going to college, well that’s cheaper than what it costs us to incarcerate a young person. If our goals are reached, everybody wins. (Richards, 2009, p. 16)

An open line of two way communication between home and school can aid on the success of students. Teachers who participated in the Mann and Meyer study (2006) that was conducted in a rural Midwestern school district believed communication with parents improved 37% after the home visits were conducted. One teacher stated, “Because of the communication between the parents and me, it has helped tremendously if there was a need for help in a subject or a discipline problem” (p. 94). A large number of the teachers concluded that because of the home visits they conducted, communication between the student and them was superior to in previous years.

As previously mentioned, Principal Teresa Swain of Rowan County Middle School has formed a home visit program at her school in the Midwest. She has 696 students attending her middle school. One hundred and fifteen of them meet federal guidelines for homelessness, primarily due to substandard living conditions. For principals and teachers with these types of students, they struggle to find ways to light
the student’s fire. Swain also stated, “You have to go to the student’s home to find out what might prevent the students from pursuing learning with vigor” (Yeats, 2007, p. 31). Many times the fire needs to be lit not only for the students but also for the student’s family.

Teachers find it easy to set high expectations for their students and encourage them to succeed. The part of that is not easy for a teacher is finding out how student’s home life is hindering their success. The way to answer that question is by conducting home visits. Swain continued:

Many students have no running water or electricity at home and arrive at school physically and emotionally unprepared for school. Conflicts and misunderstandings between teachers and students have occurred when students seem unmotivated, apathetic or defiant. Often teachers had little knowledge or understanding of what the student may have experienced the night before. (Yeats, 2007, p. 31)

Visiting the student’s home and understanding the conditions in which they live gives the teacher empathy and opens the lines of communication between the teacher, student and their family. Swain (Yeats, 2007) concluded, “The home visits made such a difference in the empathy the teachers have for their students” (p. 34).

Conducting home visits is an easy way to learn about a student’s culture. Where are they from? What foods do they eat? What traditions do they follow? Educators never know how and when that knowledge will come in handy inside or outside the classroom. The continuous development of multicultural knowledge for
teachers is critical. The influence of the teacher’s views of personal identity upon curriculum, instructional methods, the classroom environment, and student interaction is extremely important (Hollins, 1999).

It is imperative as a teacher to know and understand each student’s culture. As an educator, being culturally blind is a disservice to the students. Cultural blindness is defined as not recognizing one’s culture and treating everybody as if they were all the same (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2003). Every student is different and no one human being is the same as any other. Being aware of differences is not only important for teachers but for students as well.

Setting short and long term goals for students is crucial in their success throughout the school year. How do you know what the parents want for their child if you never ask? Home visits are the perfect opportunity to talk with the student’s families and ask them questions. A good home visit program is goal oriented and focuses on goals for student’s success (Epstein, 2004). During home visits, it is nice for students to hear what goals their families have come up with for them. These goals can be referred to throughout the school year as well as their progress toward achieving them.

Home Visit Programs

Ten years ago an organization called the Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) joined forces with a local teachers union, the Sacramento City Teachers Association, and the local school district, the Sacramento City Unified School District, to form and lead a unique K–12 home visitation model: the Parent
Teacher Home Visit Project (Rose, 2009). Since this model has surfaced it has become a national model for districts across the country and is one of the longest running home visit programs. Executive director of the project, Carrie Rose, commented that independent evaluation of the project show increased parental involvement and improved student academic and social success (Rose). Rose and her staff now help other schools and districts around the country set up similar programs. Hernandez a member of the Sacramento ACT says she saw how powerful home visits can be when families get involved in their child education (Delisio, 2008).

A study that followed the Sacramento, California home visit program in 14 schools from 1998 to 2001 found home visits correlated with an increase in homework completion, a decrease in behavioral problems and an increase in test scores. But when expanded into high schools, successes, statistically speaking, were less clear (Richards, 2009).

Another group, the Sacramento Area Congregations Together has trained various districts across the country. One of those districts is in Kansas City where the organization trained a majority of the staff members. They too have a large Latino population within their schools. Nemeth, one of the school’s principals noted, “Some go in pairs, or with interpreters, because the district has a lot of Spanish speaking families. The rewards are many. Student achievement has gone up which has been part of overall school reform” (Delisio, 2008).

The Kansas City Church Community Organization saw the need for parent involvement in their area schools and sponsored the teacher trainings for the home
visits. Warren Adams-Leavitt, executive director of the organization observed that one school in the district had a 95% participation rate in parent teacher conferences after the first home visit was conducted. He quoted, “Teachers could talk about the children much more deeply, because they understood the child’s family and background. They got a clearer idea of the student’s interests” (Delisio, 2008).

The Teacher Home Visit Program is a program at Valley Park Elementary School located in Missouri. This program was recently formed and has been conducting home visits for three years. It is designed to build bridges between parent and teachers who are not connecting effectively. The program was developed because parent involvement was the missing link throughout the school. A focus was placed on academic status and what could be done inside the home to ensure the student succeed academically. Their model is similar to the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Program in regards to conducting two home visits throughout the school year as well as their goals and objectives. Overall, the teachers and families involved felt the home visits were a positive experience for all the parties involved (Kalish, 2008).

Assistant principal Young, an advocate of home visits, works at a low-achieving school in a low-income pocket of a relatively affluent local district of LAUSD. Young is the school coordinator and sees herself as a bridge between teachers and parents, and between parents and administrators, building relationships with all stakeholders. Young organized a home visit program that involved many of the school’s teachers in visiting 300 families over four months on a voluntary basis
(including those in homeless shelters), bringing schools supplies and literacy materials. She felt the teachers were clearly affected from the program:

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Sometimes teachers, because they’re coming from another community, they really do not understand why certain things aren’t taking place in the home. So when you go to the home and you see one room where everyone’s staying…and they’re sleeping in the living room, then you start to understand, “OK, this is why they can’t get their homework done. This is why…they’re not at school on time.” So it helped to open up the teacher’s eyes. And again, the ones that got involved, they became much more compassionate. (Auerbach, 2009, p. 23)
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The home visits were one element of their parent involvement program that led to the school receiving an award from the National Network of Partnership Schools.

The Mason County School District, in 1998, ranked 126 out of 176 in Kentucky on the state’s assessment measure. This system is the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System. Since implementing a district wide home visits program, they boast nine consecutive years of increased assessment scores and reduced achievement gaps. The administrators finally realized that their needed to be a better connection between staff and students in the community. Now all 2,800 students receive a home visit prior to the school year starting. During these visits teachers create important bonds and extend education beyond the classroom inviting parents to be a part of their child’s education.
With the economic crisis our country is currently in and especially our state, many programs have had a hard time keeping their funding for home visit projects. A district in Portland, Oregon started a home visit project similar to the project implemented in Sacramento but the funding has recently been cut. Ann McMahon, a teacher at Arleta Elementary School, one of the schools in the district, teaches a second-third split. She continues to visit all thirty of her students’ homes even though district funding has ended (Delisio, 2008). She begins her home visits two weeks before school starts and spends about an hour at each home. She told Education World, “Some people prefer to come to school. I tell them the visits are to get to know them and the children” (Delisio, para. 22).

The question becomes what is necessary to design and execute an effective home visit project? From the beginning, you need the union, the district and a community organizing group. You can run a good home visit program without those three partners, but it becomes a challenge over the years if all three groups aren't involved. Beyond that, such programs require a strong leader that understands that the home is more than a physical meeting place. It is philosophy, energy, emotion. It is where kids spend the most of their time. For those rich or poor, the home is the place where people feel most at peace and most in control.

Summary

Parent involvement and home visits are an important tool in bridging the communication gap between home and school. Since the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project was formed in Sacramento, California ten years ago, a new wave of ideas have
arose. Could home visits possibly be the key to raising academic achievement among our youth? According to the research, the effects of home visits are encouraging and accomplish a significant amount in getting to know the students and their families. There is a huge importance in getting families involved when it comes to their child’s education. Home visits and parent involvement with the Latino community has become increasingly important due to California’s rising Latino population. Due to all of these factors a number of home visit projects have formed across the nation. These home visit projects are the first step in reforming our educational system in this country. Educators recognizing there is a problem could be what is needed to pull ahead in shaping the future of our next generation.
Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Background

The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacies of home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom at Tahoe Elementary School in SCUSC. Specifically the answers to these questions were sought:

- Do the families feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- Do the students feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- How did the families and their children react to the home visits?
- What effect did the home visits have on the parent teacher communication throughout the school year?

Questionnaires and interviews were the primary tools used to collect data supporting these questions. Originally, there were supposed to be two questionnaires sent out to the student’s families, one before the home visit and one after the home visit. Due to lack of response from the families on the first questionnaire a second one was never sent out. Instead a more in-depth interview was conducted with the handful of families who decided to participate in this study. Questionnaires were also completed by the students who were able to participate and in-depth interviews were held with the teacher, Mrs. Garcia, and the principal, Ms. Curry.

Sample Population

Sacramento City Unified School District is a large urban school district located in Sacramento, California serving 48,132 students in grades K-12. Their mission is to
provide all students the knowledge, skills, and educational opportunities to achieve high academic standards and be successful in a changing global society (Sacramento City Unified School District, 2010). They pride themselves on having active parent engagement and boast about their Parent Teacher Home Visit Project Leadership Academy for Parents. The school district serves a population of students who reflect a wide range of racial and cultural diversity of the area.

Within the Sacramento City Unified School District, 66% of the students receive free or reduced lunches. Figure 1 illustrates the enrollment by ethnicity. The four highest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (33%), White (22%), African American (21%) and Asian (20%).

![Ethnicity of students enrolled in SCUSD](image)

*Figure 1. Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in SCUSD.*
*Source: www.scusd.edu*
Tahoe Elementary School is located within the SCUSD in an area where students who attend the school are not necessarily from that neighborhood. Many students walk to school or are bused in from surrounding neighborhoods. They have a rich diversity of students and most families fall within the low income bracket. Of the student population, 77% are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Tahoe Elementary School is grades K-6th grade and has approximately 390 students enrolled. The school’s mission is to provide a safe and caring environment, where all children can learn. They are a Title I school which means they receive funding from the government to increase students test scores and ensure the No Child is Left Behind Act. They also have a bilingual program and a special education program. Of the student population 21% are English Learners and 7% have disabilities.

At Tahoe Elementary School, 85% of the students receive free or reduced-cost lunches. Figure 2 illustrates student enrollment by ethnicity. The four main ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (39%), White (23%), African American (22%) and Asian (8%).
Figure 2. Ethnicity of Students Enrolled at Tahoe Elementary School. 
Source: www.scusd.edu

Figure 3 illustrates the enrollment in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom by ethnicity. The four ethnic groups are Latino (44%), Asian (28%), African American (22%), and Caucasian (6%).

Figure 3. Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in Mrs. Garcia’s Classroom.  
Source: Mrs. Garcia’s records
Instrumentation

To begin this study a cover letter was devised and sent to the parents and guardians of the students in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom before the home visits began. The cover letter described how the research would go and asked for their cooperation in this study. At the bottom they could sign the form giving permission for their child to participate as well. Attached to the cover letter was a questionnaire for the families to fill out consisting of six open ended questions. This questionnaire was used to get an idea of the experiences and knowledge each family had with home visits.

Once the cover letter and questionnaire were sent out Mrs. Garcia conducted her home visits with the students and their families. The intention was for the researcher to accompany Mrs. Garcia on her home visits but due to schedule conflicts, the researcher was not able to attend any of the home visits. Mrs. Garcia conducted 18 home visits throughout the first two months of school but by the time the data for this study were collected, two of those families had moved due to economic hardships.

The first questionnaire and cover letter were collected after the home visits were conducted. Six of the 16 questionnaires were returned, so due to lack of participation a second questionnaire was not sent out and in-depth interviews were conducted with three of the six families who decided to participate in the study. The in-depth interview questions that were given to the families were focused on the information received on the first questionnaire and were geared to help answer the four research questions formulated for the study. In-depth interviews were also
conducted with Mrs. Garcia and the principal, Ms. Curry, at Tahoe Elementary School.

The students participated in the study by filling out a questionnaire that was modified for third graders. The questionnaire had six open ended questions for them to answer. This questionnaire was used to get an idea of the experiences each student had with home visits.

Data Collection and Recording

The data collected was reviewed and analyses by the researcher. The researcher categorized, synthesized, searched for patterns and interpreted data collected from the following: family completed questionnaires, family completed interviews, a teacher completed interview, an administrator completed interview and student completed questionnaires. All of this information was documented and formulated into an organized group of data to complete this study.

Limitations

There were various limitations within this study. The family completed questionnaire was limited in scope because it was only one sided with six open ended questions. The study was also limited because only six of the 16 families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom decided to participate and complete the questionnaire. Therefore findings cannot be used to generalize the feeling of all the families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom. In addition, only one classroom out of many at Tahoe Elementary School was analyzed so this study is not meant to portray the views of other classrooms,
schools or individuals. Compiling data on a larger scale from various school sites and not just one classroom at Tahoe Elementary, would give a much larger sample size with data which could be generalized.
Chapter 4

THE DATA

Presentation of the Data

This chapter analyzes the finding of the study. The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacies of the home visits conducted in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom at Tahoe Elementary School. After the questionnaires were completed and the in-depth interviews were administered, the data was analyzed and summarized. All information regarding the home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom was examined, using the following research questions:

- Do the families feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- Do the students feel that home visits have positive outcomes?
- How did the families and their children react to the home visits?
- What effect did the home visits have on the parent teacher communication throughout the school year?

The following information illustrates the four research questions along with the data results. The information gathered from either the questionnaires or the in-depth interviews will add to the already existing amount of research on home visits. The data in the research questions are specific to each question.

Research Question 1. Do the Families Feel That Home Visits Have Positive Outcomes?

The three families that were interviewed all expressed their appreciation for home visits and would recommend them as a tool to increase the communication
between home and school. Although increasing communication is a main objective for home visits, the families had many other positive outcomes that they expressed. One parent quoted, “I appreciate home visits and this tool has been wonderful in the development of student/teacher relationship.” They valued getting to know the teacher on a more personal level and to see them out of their classroom environment. One mother even said when she walks on campus more teachers and staff know her name.

A majority of the families expressed that just the feeling they and their child were left with after the teacher conducted their home visit was wonderful. The kids were so excited that their teacher had come to their house and saw their home. These families noticed more confidence in the child both socially and academically. The home visit created a stronger bond with not only the student and the teacher but the family and the teacher as well. One mother quoted, “It is important that teachers continue to conduct home visits so they can see the environment their students are living in. It can help them understand the child better and possibly explain different behaviors in the classroom.”

When I asked for specific examples of academic progress, I did not get any definite answers. One family did mention that their child is opening up to their teacher more and is progressing slowly but surely. They all mentioned academic progress and did feel that was a major outcome. One mother quoted, “I believe that a child can become successful, socially and academically if they feel/understand that their parents and their teachers truly care about their future.”
All of the families agreed that the communication between home and school has stayed strong since the home visits. They mentioned that Mrs. Garcia sends home a weekly newsletter to keep all the families informed on what is going on inside the classroom. They also mentioned that in some way they communicate with Mrs. Garcia on a consistent basis whether it be by email, phone or in person.

Research Question 2: Do the Students Feel That Home Visits Have Positive Outcomes?

After interpreting the questionnaires, the student’s consensus was that home visits did have a positive outcome on themselves and their families. They felt various emotions before, during and after the home visits. Two of the emotions they felt were nervous and happy. One student wrote she felt that Mrs. Garcia was motherly and another said that they wished she would come back.

When asked if they thought the home visit by Mrs. Garcia has been helpful, they overwhelmingly replied yes. Two of the students believed that their math skills have improved and directly contributed that to the home visit. Both students wrote that a family member is helping them with their math homework nightly. Another student commented that Mrs. Garcia had spoken with her family about what exactly she needed improvement on during the home visit, which has helped. One student wrote, “She now knows what I am like at home and uses that when I need to be challenged.”

When the question was asked if the students had more trust in Mrs. Garcia since the home visit, a quarter of them said yes because she is nice. Most students at a young age trust their teacher but some 3rd graders have a hard time conceptualizing the
word trust and may not understand why they trust someone. With that said, one student said she already trusted her and another said she seems trustworthy.

The last two questions on the questionnaire asked if anything good or bad has happened as a result of the home visit done by their teacher. Each and every one of the students said that nothing bad has happened as a result of the home visit. The positive results which they wrote were that Mrs. Garcia communicates with their families more, the students are challenged more and a few of the students have improved academically in math.

Research Question 3: How did the Families and Their Children React to the Home Visits?

Mrs. Garcia started off her interview by stating that there were a few families that did not want to participate in the home visits. She did not mention a specific reason as to why they declined to participate, but she did say that it can take families a while to warm up to the idea of someone coming into their home. She commented that the families who did participate were welcoming and made her feel very comfortable.

Throughout the in-depth interviews with the families there was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the home visits by everyone. A few of the students and families said they were a little nervous, but that once the visit started all the nerves went away. One mother mentioned, “I felt a little nervous at first having two teachers visit, but as the conversation progressed I felt more comfortable.”
Research Question 4: What Effect did the Home Visits Have on the Parent Teacher Communication

Tahoe Elementary School was spoken about very highly throughout this process by a majority of the participating families. They attributed its friendly staff to the continuing positive communication that occurs throughout the school. Each and every family said they feel comfortable at Tahoe Elementary School inside the main office, inside the classrooms, and throughout the campus. The principal, Ms. Curry, commented in her interview that she and the staff have been working on making the school an inviting atmosphere for families for years.

Mrs. Garcia said there has been a steady stream of phone calls from families throughout the school year since the home visits have occurred. She gives each family her cell phone number at the beginning of the year, which many teachers will not do, for families to call for any reason. A large number of the families communicated that they feel more comfortable calling and contacting the teacher since the home visits.

Mrs. Garcia also distributes a weekly newsletter to all of her families throughout the school year. One mother was quoted saying, “Communication has been good as usual. Mrs. Garcia sends home weekly letters, which keeps me up to date with what is going on in the class.” In those weekly newsletters, if need be, she personalizes them and informs the family of any behavioral issues or academic trouble that needs to be addressed. The newsletters are a positive way to keep the lines of communication open after the home visits and build on the relationships that were formed.
Other Data

The question was asked if the families volunteered in the classroom throughout the school year. All of the families answered no, but many of them stated that they have or will be chaperoning a field trip. After speaking with Mrs. Garcia it was clear that the families in her classroom, for various reasons, do not have the time to come into the classroom and volunteer throughout the school year. Mrs. Garcia commented that she does not ask families to come into the classroom and volunteer their time but rather assist them in various ways to help their child academically at home. She noted, “I do not have parent involvement in the classroom due to the families low socioeconomic levels, but I do ask however that there be parent involvement at home. I show them how that can be achieved.”

The principal at Tahoe Elementary, Ms. Curry, was interviewed and she kept referring back to the mistrust families have with the public school system and authorities. She insisted that there needs to be a break though of the cycle of mistrust. She quoted, “…if we can do that, it seems the behavior changes and the child can’t play the parent and the teacher against each other.” Mrs. Garcia also referred to the cycle of mistrust and said that home visits make the community more excepting of the teachers and the schools. She commented that she can drive through the community and everybody knows her and waves.

Ms. Curry also referenced her home visit log book and said that there has been 144 home visits so far this school year (2009-2010) completed by the staff at. It the 2008-2009 school year 154 home visits were completed throughout the entire school
year, so they are head of the game this year. She commented, however, that just because her staff does the initial home visit does not mean that that connection was kept, “Home visits are one of the most powerful ways to make connections with the families in your classroom; you just have to keep that connection throughout the school year.”

Summary

This chapter analyzed the research findings using two instruments, the questionnaires and the in-depth interviews. The findings of this research study demonstrated that both the students and their families saw positive results to the home visits that were conducted by Mrs. Garcia. The efficacies of the home visits were laid out throughout the chapter and additional information from Mrs. Garcia’s interview and Ms. Curry’s interview were used as supporting evidence. Home visits were widely praised by all the subjects involved in this study. They overwhelmingly felt that home visits are an effective tool teachers can use to form relationships with their students and families and bridge the communication between home and school.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This research study presents an analysis to figure out the efficacy of home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom at Tahoe Elementary School. It revealed the reflections, attitudes and thoughts of the students, their families, teacher and principal at the school site. The results of this study were interpreted as a means to understand the effect of home visits in this specific classroom. This chapter includes a brief summary of the study including information received from the participants. Finally, conclusions drawn from the findings will be presented and recommendations for home visit programs will be suggested for further research.

Research on the efficacies of home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom was conducted during the 2009-2010 school year at Tahoe Elementary School. The research began with an initial questionnaire for all of the families whose students were in the classroom. The families who decided to participate were then interviewed and their children participated by filling out a questionnaire. The teacher, Mrs. Garcia, and the principal, Ms. Curry, were both interviewed as well. The researcher gathered this data over a six months period of the school year.

Conclusions

The researcher concludes that the students and their families in Mrs. Garcia’s classroom, Mrs. Garcia herself, and the principal at Tahoe Elementary School, are all advocates of home visits. All of the subjects agreed that the outcomes of home visits
were positive and beneficial to not only the students but their families as well. The
communication between the student, their families and the teacher increased due to the
home visits. Many of the student’s confidence in school increased as well, both
socially and academically. According to Mrs. Garcia the students seem more engaged
in the classroom which results in almost no behavioral problems and her attendance
this year arose to 95%. Mrs. Garcia also commented, “Home visits are a good tool for
me to learn more about each student, which allows me to adapt the curriculum
accordingly.”

Home visits are the perfect opportunity to educate the families about what they
can do at home to help their child. This was also a point both Mrs. Garcia and Ms.
Curry brought up during their interviews. The more educators can get parents involved
in participating in their children’s education, the more successful the child can
potentially be. Goodson, Swartz, and Millsap (1991) noted that successful family
education programs focused on empowering parents.

Recommendations

Based on the research and data gathered the efficacies of home visits are
positive and ensure that home visits are a great tool for teachers to use in their
classroom. Effective home visit programs have been linked to a number of positive
outcomes for families and their children. To implement an effective home visits
program at school there has to be support from the families and the teachers.
To accomplish this, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendations for Teachers and the School Site**

1. The front office should be welcoming and friendly to all its guests.

2. Home visits should be voluntary for all teachers and staff.

3. Training should be completed by all teachers and staff who are going to be conducting home visits. It should include the following elements.
   a. Before the school year begins, send home a letter describing what home visit are and inform the families the reasons you are conducting them. Be aware that that letter may need to be in another language other than English.
   b. Be aware if a translator is needed to take with you to the home visits.
   c. Be flexible with the times you can conduct a home visit.
   d. Be open to meeting families at places other than their home. Some families may take a while to warm up to you and invite you into their home.
   e. All families should receive two home visits per year; once before the school year begins and a follow-up in the spring.
   f. Always view parents as valuable resources; they know their child the best.
   g. During the home visit discuss with the family what type of communication you will use to contact each other in the future (i.e.
email or phone). Continue the open lines of communication with the families after the home visit.

h. Offer the family tools they can use to be involved at home. Come prepared with examples.

i. Do not write anything down during the home visits. You do not want the family thinking you are judging them or documenting anything. So you do not forget, write down what you want to remember immediately after the visit.

j. Continue ongoing communication with the families throughout the school year by sending home a weekly newsletter or something similar.

k. Encourage an active Parent Teachers Association (PTA).

l. Provide suggestions for positive home conditions that support at home learning.

m. Have an open door policy where families are welcome in the classroom at any time, assuming that time is appropriate.

n. Inform families how they can become involved in the community.

o. On the second home visit in the spring, come prepared. Have documentation of how the child is progressing academically and offer any further suggestions.

p. Always ask the families if they have any comments or concerns at the end of the home visit.
Many families do not know how to support their child academically and are looking for guidance and support from teachers and other school staff. Once they receive support they become empowered and become a crucial part in their child’s education. They become involved in their child’s learning and guide them in the right direction.

For families to be supportive of home visits, the researcher makes the following suggestions.

*Recommendations for Families*

1. Have an open mind about home visits. Be open to the idea of teachers and staff coming into your home.
2. Know that the teachers and staff are not there to document anything or judge you in any way.
3. Be flexible as to when you are available for a home visit.
4. Make a list of question or concerns you have for the teacher ahead of time, so you do not forget once the home visit has begun.
5. Be attentive when the home visit is occurring.
6. Be committed to continue the open lines of communication with the teacher and the school staff after the home visit is conducted.
7. Be committed to take an active role in your child’s education. Utilize the tools and suggestions that the teacher gives you during the home visit.

There is a limited amount of literature and research regarding home visit programs across the country. Pilot studies are currently being implemented to analyze
the efficacy of home visits on students and their families. The more information that is available, the better chance educators will have to enact effective home visit programs within their district.

Finally, this research can be added to limited amount of research that is out there on home visit programs. Recommendations were made for teachers, school staff and families to improve the effectiveness of home visit programs and be added to future research. It is vital that educators continue to push for these types of programs to improve home school communication and ultimately raise academic success. Effective partnerships are crucial and it is important to get everyone involved in the success of children. Home visits are a tool educators can use to build these partnerships with those who know the children best, their families. They are a unique opportunity for everyone to work together in a comfortable environment. It is a cooperative effort intended to develop and enhance the lives of children and families.
APPENDIX A

Parental Consent Form
Dear Parents and Guardians;

I am a graduate student at California State University Sacramento in the teacher education department. I am currently working with other educators on how to improve the skills and knowledge we have obtained, to give children a more positive and rewarding educational experience. As a part of my efforts I am conducting research on the efficacies or outcomes of home visits in Mrs. Garcia’s 3rd grade classroom. Your teacher has graciously volunteered to help me in my quest.

My research will go as follows:

1) I have a questionnaire that I would like you to complete, see attachment.
2) I will accompany Mrs. Garcia on some of her home visits as an observer.
3) In approximately January, I will have a follow-up questionnaire for you to complete and a questionnaire for your child.
4) I will be conducting interviews with some of the families to gather additional information from you regarding the effects of home visits on your family.

The attached questionnaire will be collected at the time of your home visit. For your participation in this research you will receive a *lottery scratcher*.

You and your child's participation in this study are voluntary and there is no risk involved for either of you. You can choose to withdraw from this research project at any time.

The results of the research study may be published, but you and your child's name will not be used. The information I receive from these questionnaires and any interviews will be disposed of after the conclusion of my research.

I would appreciate your cooperation in this research project. If you have any questions concerning the research study or you and/or your child's participation in this study, please call me anytime at (530) 518-####.

Sincerely,

Alicia Unsinn

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____________________ to participate in the above research.

_________________________  ___________________________  ________________
Signature                  Printed Name                  Date
APPENDIX B

Home Visit Questionnaire
Home Visit Questionnaire #1

*Please have this questionnaire filled out by the time of your home visits and myself or Mrs. Garcia will pick them up in exchange for a lottery scratcher!* *Please use the back of this sheet, if needed!*

1. Name:

2. Have you experienced a home visit before? If so, when and do you have any thoughts or feelings about the home visit? Any specific outcome?

3. What has been your experience in the past with the communication between your child’s school and your home?

4. What type of experiences have you had with other teachers?

5. Do you feel comfortable going into your child’s school? Is the school inviting?

6. Have you experienced any behavior problems with your child in the past?
APPENDIX C

Student Questionnaire
Student Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. How did you feel when Mrs. Garcia came into your home?

3. Has it helped you in school since Mrs. Garcia has come into your home? How?

4. Do you feel you can trust your teacher more since she has come into your home? How?

5. What has happened in school or at home that is good since your teacher has been to your home?

6. Has anything bad happened from your teacher coming into your home?
APPENDIX D

Family In-Depth Interview Questions
Family In-Depth Interview Questions

1. How did you feel during the home visit?

2. How did you feel after the home visit?

3. Have you noticed a change in your child since the home visit? Behaviorally? Academically?

4. Do you feel more comfortable going into the classroom since the home visit? School office?

5. How has the communication between home and school been since the home visit? Has anything changed?

6. Have you noticed any specific outcome of the home visit since it occurred? Family? Student?

7. Would you recommend home visits as a tool to increase communication between home and school? Increase academic success?

8. Have you volunteered or plan to volunteer in the classroom this year? How? When? How much?

9. Anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX E

Teacher In-Depth Interview Questions
Teacher In-Depth Interview Questions

1. In general, how did your home visits go at the beginning of this school year?
   Parent reactions?
2. Did you have any setbacks?
3. How did you get involved in home visits?
4. What is your viewpoint on home visits?
5. What specific outcomes have you had this year in our classroom from doing home visits? Previous years?
6. Any behavioral changes? Academic successes?
7. How have the home visits affected your communication with the families in your classroom? With the school?
8. Has your parent participation increased? Previously?
9. How have the home visits affected your community? This year? Previously?
10. Anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX F

Administrator In-Depth Questions
Administrator In-Depth Interview Questions

1. What is your viewpoint on home visits?

2. Do you support your staff conducting home visits?

3. Have you been on a home visit before? How was your experience?

4. What specific outcomes have you seen or experienced from you or your staff conducting home visits? Academically? Behaviorally?

5. How does you or your staff conducting home visits effect the communication between home and school?

6. How do you or your staff conducting home visits affect your community?

7. Do you think your school is inviting for families to come into and feel comfortable? How? Why?

8. Have you heard any positive or negative feedback about home visits from families who have participated?

9. Anything else you would like to add?
REFERENCES


