

A Practical Guide to Education Chapter 2

How to Work in Conditions of Change and Instability

Times of emergencies - wars, social upheavals, natural disasters, or poverty - tend to undermine teachers' motivation, support, and participation. Due to the collapse of administrative systems, teachers may be forced to work without pay, some are persecuted, and many are victims of violence. Working in very large classes, teachers may have a lack of time to give individual attention to students and may be unable to discipline and manage effectively without assistance. In addition, the difficulty of teaching in these circumstances is likely to be compounded by the scarcity of instructional resources and adequate facilities. In spite of such challenges, there are actions you can take to combat the difficulties and successfully educate the children in your community.

Teachers can offer a strong and resilient foundation to a community in emergency by providing a sense of continuity and stability. They serve as professional and caring adult role models by taking responsibility for children's well-being and growth. Teachers have a unique opportunity to build safe, sheltered, and community-like environments and to organize educational activities for students who are likely to be geographically displaced and psychologically disoriented. Particularly important is the creation of substantial support networks both in the teaching process and in the management of the school. Such networks establish an atmosphere of collaboration, where teachers do not feel professionally isolated and where community members acknowledge and support their efforts, because they know that teachers are fulfilling the needs of the community.

2.1 Parental and Community participation

The conservation of culture and the process of taking part in social and cultural life are recognized human rights. Culture provides children with identity and continuity - especially important in times of struggle or change. By learning the values and traditions of their culture, children learn how to fit into their family, their community, and the larger society. Culture constantly develops and adapts to changes in community lifestyle. Society members must work together to ensure that their culture is preserved.

Several different degrees of participation can be defined. Shaeffer (1994), describes a "ladder of participation" which leads from passive parent and community involvement, such as manipulation and the mere use of service, to increasingly participatory activities where participants are consulted, then they share decision-making in activities initiated by others, and finally they decide on and direct activities

initiated themselves. For the local population, including parents, teachers, and community at large, the last stage of the ladder implies taking full responsibility in considering the rationale, implications, and potential outcomes of educational programs. Specifically, it implies community participation in the following stages of educational development activities:

- l diagnosing and defining problems
- l collecting and analyzing information
- l articulating priorities and setting goals
- l assessing available resources
- l deciding on and planning programs
- l implementing strategies and assigning responsibilities among participants
- l managing programs
- l evaluating results and impact
- l redefining problems generated for further action
- l monitoring progress

It is important to have a general idea of who and at what level of educational system is involved in the major decision-making about the nature and quality of education provided in schools, and the extent to which individuals and groups outside of the school get involved in this process. The table below can be used to carry out such an analysis (Shaeffer, 1994). For each of the major categories of potential partners in education at the school and community levels - parents, parent-teacher associations, community organizations, and NGOs - write down and discuss what role or responsibility each partner has in education. This can be done in the open community meeting, parent/teacher meeting, or any other community forum. For example, you can discuss the following issues:

- l What kind and degree of involvement occurs in each case?
- l What are potential/desired areas of cooperation?
- l What are the obstacles to more involvement participation?

How partners can collaborate:

Potential collaboration	Diagnosing educational conditions and needs	Setting school goals, policies, and programs	Setting and managing school budgets	Determining content and designing materials	Teaching and learning process
Individual parents					
Parent/teacher associations					

Community organizations					
NGO's/private enterprises					

From: Shaeffer, S. (1994). Partnerships and participation in basic education, v. I. France: UNESCO, IIEP.

Parental influence on children

Parents are usually the first and most influential teachers of children. In their first years of life, parents teach children the language, symbols, and meanings used in their culture. Parents, as primary role models, contribute significantly to children's acquisition of skills and values. Because of their vital roles, it is important that parents stay involved in their children's lives, both at home and at school. School is only one form of education, and the education children receive at home should be connected to the school in order to provide continuity. Parent participation helps to build community, for parents will feel that they have a stake in the school's success and can take pride when it succeeds. It also builds inter-generational ties, as children and parents work together toward a common goal (basic education). Children are more likely to recognize the importance of education if they see their parents participating in their schooling. Through collaboration, parent and community motivation to support education increases.

Community influence on children

Successful schools are usually schools which are fully supported by their communities. This support does not mean only financial support. The mistake is often made of equating community support to a financial contribution. While a financial contribution may be one way community members express interest and responsibility for children's welfare, it is by no means the only way. Community members can take responsibility by devoting more time to establishing and to establishing and strengthening links between school activities and participation in society.

2.2 How to establish school/parent/community partnerships

There are a variety of ways through which the school can open itself to parents and the community. Specific activities and organizations can encourage parental interest in what is happening in school and act as a necessary first step toward the development of greater and more meaningful participation. As suggested by Shaeffer (1994), these may include the following:

School/parent/community activities:

| open days, speech days, and sport days

| explanations to parents about the content and methods of teaching and learning at

schools

l parent observation of classes

l training parents in how better to assist and encourage learning of their children at home

l identifying candidates for teaching and assisting in interviewing, selecting, orienting, and monitoring them

l parent assistants to teachers who help students during school time with assignments and projects

l parents teaching community crafts in which they are experts and telling about the history and culture of the area

l parents constructing and repairing school buildings, grounds, and facilities

Fears about the security of girls in a school can be resolved by having a mothers' committee formed, with a "mother-in-charge" visiting to the school regularly to oversee the safety of girls.

Gender considerations

Parent/school organizations

These kinds of organizations reach beyond the immediate school community to those individuals most directly concerned with the delivery of education. Therefore, they include:

l parent associations

l parent/teacher associations

These organizations can help to establish a forum for dialogue between school and parents and strengthen parental involvement in school life.

CASE STUDY: Parent Learning Support System (PLSS) in the Philippines

Recognizing that homes, communities, and schools contribute equally to the teaching and learning of children, this system provides a organized way for parents and community members to assume roles in formal school settings. Objectives of the PLSS are:

l to support and cooperate with teachers to improve students' ability to learn

l to develop desirable values, attitudes, and behaviors

l to identify home factors that affect students' cognitive and affective development

l to conduct regular group discussions and to encourage group decision-making

To implement a PLSS, teachers form a core parent group to organize activities. Parents observe their children in the classroom and at play, then they schedule individual meetings with the teacher. The teacher makes home visits. The

collaboration is rewarded at the end of the school year in a ceremony during which parents receive certificates of participation. In the Philippines, initial results of the PLSS program showed increased cognitive and affective achievement of students, improved relations between teachers and parents, coherence between what is taught at home and at school, and minimization of "culture shock" of new entrants to schooling.

From: International Institute for Educational Planning Teaching Materials, Partnerships and participation in basic education, Volume II, Case Study Abstracts, UNESCO 1994)

Community organizations

Since education benefits the community as a whole, it should involve all sectors of the community in some shared responsibility and accountability for activities inside and outside the school. Such sectors can have different names and structures. Their members can be nominated representatives of important formal institutions in the community, such as religious bodies, local government, and NGOs, or community members representing less organized interest groups, such as women's organizations and traditional cultural societies. For example, the following activities are suggested:

- | local community leaders come to speak to the children about community affairs;
- | religious leaders speak to the children about religious affairs
- | school programs are implemented that benefit local social, cultural, and economic life (for example, school facilities, libraries, and materials open to the community)

- | village education committees (for example, to set policies related to staff development, school-community relationships, and specific school improvement activities)

There are no strict rules to follow when involving parents and community members in the schooling process. Parents and communities may begin their involvement in very simple ways, but as their knowledge, skills, and experience grow their involvement will considerably increase.

Teacher associations:

In addition to creating school/parent/community organizations, teachers may want to collaborate with other teachers in the community through:

- | school clusters - several schools, usually relatively close to each other in location and homogeneous in nature; and
- | teacher organizations, such as groups of teachers working together in teacher clubs or teacher associations (Shaeffer, 1994).

School clusters and teacher organizations of various kinds can play an important role in helping to overcome isolation of teachers and schools, and providing a forum for the discussion of critical issues and to cooperate in problem-solving.

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