
Parent classroom involvement and the development of social capital: a reading program in East Vancouver

Cherylynn Bassani

*Centre for Community Child Health Research,
University of British Columbia*

Abstract

Parents have the potential to play an important role in the development of social capital in their children's classrooms. Both theoretical and empirical evidence suggest that parents' classroom participation is directly linked to higher academic achievement and pro-social behaviour in the children. This study examines the influence that the in-class parent reading component of the Partners in Education (PIE) program had on parents and children. By evaluating teacher observations of parents who participated in the PIE program and their children over the 2005/2006 school year, the results of this study support the continued funding of this program (and of similar programs). Teachers reiterated fundamental parent, student and parent-student changes. For many students, the reading program enriched the social capital in their classroom as parents moved from being out-group to in-group classroom members, thereby positively influencing their level of support and also their confidence which, in turn, enabled students to improve their academic achievement and or sociability.

Introduction

Social capital, the product of social relations, makes an important difference in classroom dynamics and student learning (Bassani 2008; Coleman 1987, 1988; Goddard, 2003; Guzman et al 2001; McNeal, 1999; Parcel & Dufur, 2001). Research that identifies the link between student well-being and parent participation in the school has shown that parents who volunteer in schools positively influence not only their own child's learning and achievement, but also that of their child's classmates (Cronan et al., 1996; Desimone 1999; Fagan 1998; Morrow, 1995; Parcel & Dufur, 2001). For some parents and teachers, this may be a well-known 'fact,' but for others, the full benefit of having parents actively involved in the classroom and the learning process may not be fully realized.

This paper assesses the influence of parental classroom participation via the Partners in Education (PIE) reading program on parent and child attitudes and behaviours. This analysis is not only imperative for the ongoing development and running of the program, but equally important, it acts as a model illustrating that programs which include parents in the classroom enable the enrichment of social capital and ultimately work to increase children's well being. Building social capital in the classroom, school, and family is fundamental to children's positive development and achievement. Because of this, programs that strengthen social capital need to be developed and shared within the education community.

Parents' involvement and the development of social capital

Parents' involvement helps develop rich social capital within schools and classrooms and thus influences students' well-being and learning.

Social capital is the product of social relations, and according to social capital theory (SCT), it is the most important factor for understanding disparities in youths' well-being. Briefly, SCT has five main dimensions (Bassani, 2007).

First, the theory identifies five forms of capital: social (the product of social relations), human (eg, education level), financial (eg, income or and other monetary resources), cultural (the knowledge and practice of the dominant culture and the integration—if any—of subdominant cultural knowledge and practice), and physical/material (eg, computers, books). Of these forms of capital, social capital is deemed most crucial because of its role in mobilizing the other forms of capital. For example, a father's education level (human capital) can influence a child only if the child has a relationship with the father.

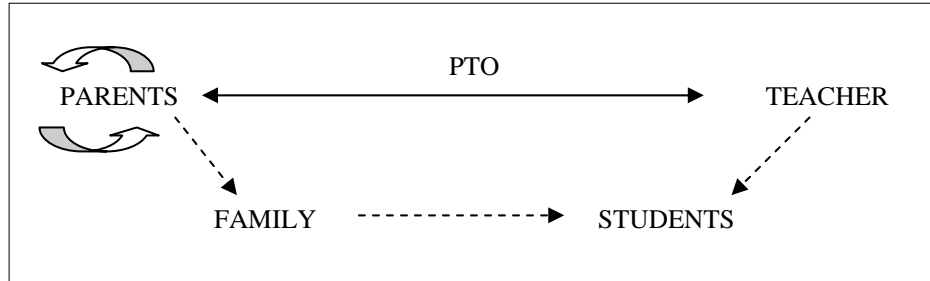
Second, in the general population, there is a positive relation between social capital and well being: as social capital increases so does the child's well being.

Third, capital is produced when resources are transformed or mobilized. Mobilization is concerned with both structural and functional social resources, which are the two components of social capital. For example, a biological two-parent family with one child represents the family's structural social resources, which are transformed into social capital only when functional social efficiencies are present. In other words, these resources are transformed into useable capital when parents and the child have positive relationships and interact on a regular basis. The formation of social capital is the fourth dimension of the theory. Here we see that functional social resources are enhanced by shared values and group closure.

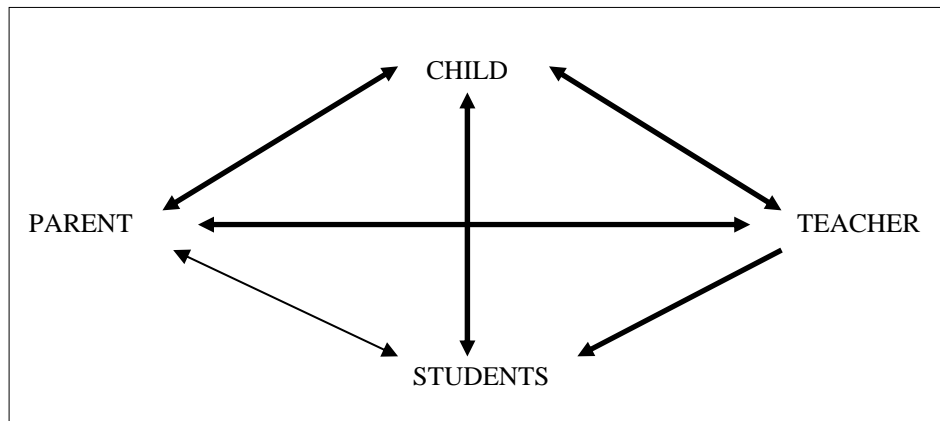
Last, SCT identifies that social capital is enhanced when group-to-group bridging occurs. For example, when parents become in-group members of their child's school or classroom, social capital in both the school and family is enhanced. No matter what the social capital in the family, this bridging works to increase the family and school social capital. For individuals in families with lower levels of social capital, the enrichment of social capital in the school can be particularly positive. In addition, the opposite is also argued: children in families and schools with low

levels of social capital will experience diminished well-being. Social capital theory is highly useful in explaining disparities in children's well being.

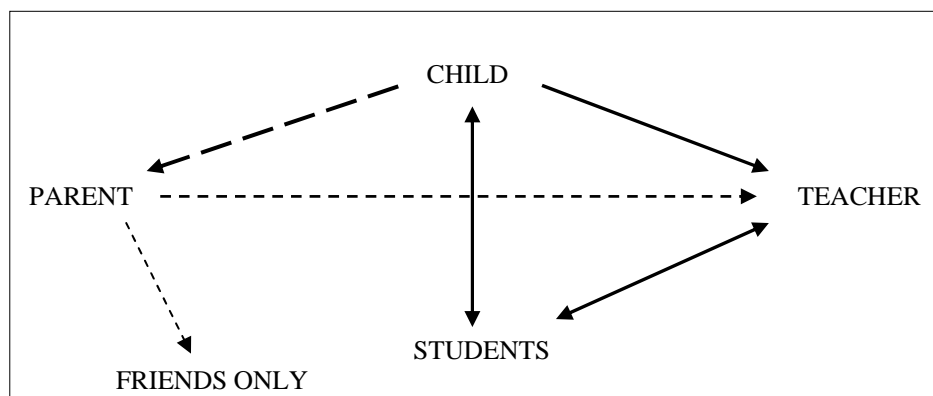
Figure 1: Development of social capital in the school



(a) Development of social capital in parent-teacher organization (PTO)



(b) Development of social capital when parents volunteer in the classroom



(c) Social capital when parents do not volunteer in the classroom

Social capital in the school is influenced by parental volunteerism. There are three general types of parent involvement in the school: (1) through a parent-teacher organization (PTO), (2) by volunteering in the child's classroom, and (3)

uninvolvement (see Figures 1a-1c). Parents can influence the development of school-based social capital in one of three ways. Parents can help develop school-based social capital through an adult-centred group, as is the case when parents volunteer in a PTO (Figure 1a) or through student-centred groups, as in the case when parents volunteer in the classroom (Figure 1b). As illustrated in Figure 1c, parents also can opt not to be involved in their child's school or classroom. In this situation, the social capital that develops in the classroom is weaker than is shown in Figure 1b.

In the first two instances, parental involvement enriches the social capital in the school; however, social capital developed in PTOs will have an indirect (and weaker) influence on students, while volunteering in the classroom will have a direct (and stronger) influence. Figure 1a illustrates the social capital that develops in a PTO and the path of individuals that it can potentially influence. Here we see that only children of PTO parents are indirectly influenced by this social capital through their families. In addition, all students of PTO teachers will be indirectly influenced by social capital developed in the PTO. While this influence on children is indirect, it is also important to note that this effect will be largest for students whose parents are in the PTO. PTO volunteering does not, therefore, positively influence all students in a classroom to the same degree because students are only indirectly influenced by teachers and/or parents.

Figure 1b illustrates the pathways of social capital that develop when parents volunteer within their children's classroom. Here we see the direct, strong influence that parents have on developing social capital in the classroom, and thus the direct effect of social capital on students. In this case, parents are directly interacting with their own children, and other students in the classroom, in addition to the teacher. In this situation, they are in-group members of the classroom. In addition, there is an indirect effect of social capital on students through classmates and the teacher that enriches the existing social capital in the classroom. The introduction of parents into the classroom thus creates an entirely new classroom dynamic—one that encourages the development of rich social capital. Social capital theory maintains that the social capital that develops in the classroom setting will have a meaningful, positive influence on children's well-being.

The third type of parent involvement is illustrated in Figure 1c which shows the development and pathway of social capital in the classroom when parents do not volunteer. Direct, school-based contact between parent and child and between parent and teacher is still evident, but these relationships are weaker than that portrayed in Figure 1b. In the previous figure, parents are in-group members, while in the latter they are out-group members. As out-group members, parents have limited school-based interaction with their children and the teacher (perhaps only during parent-teacher interviews). In addition, in this situation parents will have a direct relationship only with classmates who are friends with their children. However, this relationship is not school-based. Because the parent is not an in-group member of the classroom, the structural social resources (members of the group) are diminished; thus the social capital that develops in Figure 1c will not be as rich as that which develops in Figure 1b.

To review, in all three figures, students and teachers are the primary in-group members of the classroom. Parents are secondary members, but they can choose to be either in-group (Figure 1b) or out-group (Figures 1a and 1c) members of the classroom. When parents become in-group members, the structural social resources in the classroom increase as do the potential functional social resources; this results in the enrichment of social capital in the classroom. Parent classroom volunteerism builds relationships between parents and their children, parents and other students, and parents and teachers. Social capital theory argues that parental volunteerism enriches the social capital in the classroom and, in turn, is apt to have widespread, direct, positive effects on all classroom members.

The Partners in Education Program

The Partners in Education Program (PIE) is an adult-based literacy program that began in 2005. It has four components: (1) direct adult (primary caregiver) learning, (2) caregiving education and support, (3) primary caregiver-child class time, and (4) direct child learning that takes place in the elementary (grades 1-3) or early childhood education classroom. This paper assesses the success of the third and fourth components of the program by examining how parents' and children's (grades 1-3 only) attitudes and behaviours changed after being in the PIE for one school year.

The program is run out of five elementary schools in Vancouver, British Columbia. The neighbourhood where these schools are located is considered to be Canada's poorest postal code area (Statistics Canada, 2001) and, as such, programs that bridge the family and school have been implemented over the last decade. The largest problem with former (and current) programs is their limited duration, which has been attributed to a lack of parent and teacher interest and the lack of financial resources. Currently, the PIE program is in its fourth year. It is hoped that an examination of the program's influence on primary caregivers and children will promote a continued interest in the reading program. In addition, this paper aims to provide information to other program developers and researchers in the hope that this or similar programs will be implemented to help children and their families throughout Canada and elsewhere.

Data and methods

Data

The data used in the paper come from interviews that were conducted with elementary school teachers concerning students' (whose parents were involved in the Partners in Education literacy program) progress over the 2005-2006 school year. In the first year, 30 children and their parents participated in the PIE program. All of these children's teachers were interviewed. In total, 30 interviews were conducted with 12 primary school teachers at three schools. Two interviewers conducted the interviews. Both interviewers and all of the teachers were female. Teachers had a wide range of teaching experience, from two years to two decades.

Interviewers met with teachers over a four-week period during April/May 2006. A series of open-ended questions was provided to teachers at least one week prior to

being interviewed so that they could prepare responses for each of the students with parents in the PIE program. Audio-recorded interviews ranged from 15 to 40 minutes each, with an average interview time of 30 minutes.

Research ethics for this project were passed through the PIE Research Advisory Committee. This committee is comprised of youth researchers and elementary school community members who are responsible for reviewing and permitting research applications and for the PIE's 2005/ 2006 research activities.

Sample

A description of the sample is shown in Table 1. Seventeen primary caregivers participated in the PIE program during the 2005/2006 school year. The majority of these caregivers (88.2%) were women and nearly 70% were from visible ethnic minorities. Nearly half of the sample of primary caregivers (41.2%) were immigrants, and only 11.8% were born in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). In addition, approximately half of the children whose primary caregiver was in the PIE program had parents who had less than a high school diploma. This description of the sample is indicative of East Vancouver neighbourhoods. Typically, these have a high proportion of immigrants, visible minorities, and lower educational completion than the provincial and GVRD average.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of primary care giver participant in the partners in education reading program

Primary Caregiver's (PK) Gender			
	Female	88.2 (15)	
	Male	11.8 (2)	
PK Highest Education Level		Mother	Father
	Some elementary or less	35.3 (6)	29.4 (5)
	Completed elementary	17.6 (3)	17.6 (3)
	Completed high school	11.8 (2)	17.6 (3)
	Some Post Secondary	5.9 (1)	5.9 (1)
	Completed Post Secondary	11.8 (2)	5.9 (1)
	Missing	17.6 (3)	23.5 (4)
PK Ethnicity			
	First Nation	29.4 (5)	
	Chinese	29.4 (5)	
	Caucasian	29.4 (5)	
	Other (Eastern European)	5.9 (1)	
	Missing	5.9 (1)	
PK Immigrant Status			
	Immigrant to Canada	41.2 (7)	
	Native to Canada	58.8 (10)	
PK Born In GVRD			
	Yes	11.8 (2)	

	No	88.2 (15)
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Methods

To examine the PIE program's influence on students and parents, teachers were asked about changes in behaviours and attitudes that they observed over the 2005/2006 school year among students and parents in the PIE program. Latent content analysis was used to extract reoccurring themes within the teachers' interviews, which constituted a teacher-centred analysis of the PIE program.

Results and discussion

Teachers' observations of parents

Four main themes regarding observations of parents in the PIE classroom reading program emerged from the teacher-interviews: (1) parents' sense of belonging, (2) helping other students, (3) attitude change towards the curriculum, teacher, and school, and (4) parent-child interaction.

Parents' sense of belonging

The majority of teachers acknowledged that the more time parents spent participating in the program, the more comfortable they seemed to feel within the classroom. According to the teachers, most parents experienced a transitional period during which they moved from being passive in terms of classroom dynamics, to taking an active role. This transition appeared to be associated with the frequency that parents attended classes. Most teachers reported that at the beginning of the program, most parents were reluctant and uneasy about their presence in the classroom. One teacher stated that in the beginning,

[one] mom didn't speak in class. Was able to but didn't want to. [She was] very, very shy. Extremely shy, but refused to speak. She would say that I am the teacher. . . . [She] just would not speak, not even to me. (P9)

Another teacher commented that parents:

appear[ed] to be quite, um, I don't know, nervous, coming in to the school [classroom]. Thinking maybe, 'Oh, I don't know if I should be here.' (P22)

Many teachers observed that parents were in the 'background' at the beginning of the program and explained that parents who attended regularly had grown comfortable in the classroom, and in the school more generally, six months later, at the end of the program. One teacher explained:

She appears more comfortable in the school [classroom]. . . . There seems to be a sense that she belongs here, that she kind of knows her way around, and moves around freer. She seems physically more comfortable. (P22)

On a related note, some teachers also commented that they had developed positive relationships with parents who regularly participated in the program. One teacher stated:

It was [good] for me just to keep seeing her and for her and I to develop a rapport over the weeks. So it just became much more relaxing, she and I could have little chats in the classroom, 'Oh, how are you doing?' It just really showed me how great it is to let that relationship between a parent and teacher evolve. (P22)

Interestingly, another teacher found that one parent had become so much a part of the class that she had 'noticed in the last month or so that she's more open, she's always interrupting me [laughs]' (P21). This is particularly noteworthy because at the beginning of the year this parent, like most of the PIE parents, seemed to view herself as an outsider to the classroom, characterized as being 'shy' and 'reluctant' to be in the classroom. While classroom interruptions can be problematic for classroom dynamics and learning, it is clear by viewing this parent's level of comfort in the classroom, that she, like others, had made the transition to being an in-group member.

Based on the interviews, it was not possible to conclude whether the flourishing of the parent-teacher relationship helped parents develop a sense of belonging or vice-versa. Future research needs to examine this specific question.

Not all parents were reported to have achieved a sense of belonging in their child's classroom. Teachers stated that such parents participated in the program only sporadically.

Teachers reported that most parents did develop a sense of belonging in the classroom and, that as this occurred, parents' behaviours tended to change. By the end of the school year, these parents were found to: actively help other students in the class; be actively involved in the academic development of their own child; have developed a stronger parent-teacher relationship than they previously had; and help out more within the school (through field trip participation and with general school events). In addition, teachers noted that some parents who regularly attended the program returned to the classroom more frequently.

Parents' sense of belonging in the classroom clearly illustrates the transition that parents made from out-group to in-group member. This is the transition between Figures 1c and 1b. As this transformation occurred and parents developed a sense of agency in the classroom, the social capital in the classroom was enriched. As a result, parents' behaviours also changed.

Helping other children

Many teachers echoed the sentiment that as parents' began to identify as being a part of the classroom, they began to help other students. This is an important aspect of group membership because parents not only could see the needs of other children, but they also could act on these observations. Among the parents that helped other children in the classroom, teachers stated that these parents either asked the teacher how they could assist other students or autonomously began helping other students. Teachers explained:

I've also noticed, um, she's always coming to help in the classroom. (P23)

She doesn't just help her child. She helps other children as well. She helps all the children. (P22)

Not all parents, however, had progressed to the stage of helping other students apart from their own children. Teachers identified these specific parents as having sporadic participation in the program, suggesting that (work) schedules often interfered with individual parents' participation. Regardless of the reasons behind limited participation in the program, it is likely that parents who did not establish a sense of belonging in the classroom are more reluctant to: (1) continue participating in the reading program, and (2) interact with other students in the classroom and/or the teacher because their sense of belonging would not be developed. These parents have not made the transition to in-group members and thus might feel that they lack the agency to participate in the classroom. Parents helping students other than their own children is a crucial factor in the development of social capital in the classroom. The reading program enabled the enrichment of classroom social capital and a change in behaviour for many parents. This study did not examine the influence of social capital on the well-being of students in general, though it would be important to address in subsequent analyses of this and/or other programs.

Attitude towards the curriculum/ teacher/ school

Many teachers expressed that the more parents participated in the reading program, the more they understood and respected the curriculum, the teachers, and the work that their children do in school. Teachers discussed the misconceptions that many parents had about the educational system, stating that:

They're just working with conceptions of what they think goes on. When they come in they can see exactly what their children are doing. (P4)

[They] are learning about what their child is doing and they are usually quite surprised at what they can do, at how well they're doing. (P4)

Another reiterated the parents' sense of shock when she said:

I noticed how surprised she was at the amount of work and at the type of work that we were doing, the level that it was at. I think that she might have been under the misconception that things at school were a little bit more laid back and easy. (P8)

A change in the parents' attitude was suggested to be almost immediate, taking place after spending only one or two sessions in their children's classroom. Many teachers felt that this was the most important change that they saw in the parents, though many acknowledged that this process occurred in conjunction with the transformation from out-group to in-group member.

A few teachers emphasized the significance of this transformation, particularly among parents who had not been educated in Canada. Some commented that it was especially important for these parents 'to see the different way that school is done here' (P9, P20) to not only educate parents about the curriculum and school system, but in doing so, to lessen the school-culture-family conflict that some immigrant

students faced because of the demanding educational expectations that some parents placed on their children.

Teachers reiterated a common critical perception that both native-born and immigrant parents had towards the curriculum and perhaps of the teachers themselves. Teachers stated that at the outset of being involved in the reading program, some parents felt that the curriculum was too easy and that students were not working hard enough at their studies in the classroom (or at home). After parents had been involved in the program, however, numerous teachers reiterated similar parent-teacher experiences: parents approached teachers and stated their shock about the high difficulty level of the curriculum and the students' hard work. One teacher shared a conversation that she had with a parent and said that:

After sitting in on our lessons, she came to me afterwards and said, 'Wow what you guys are doing is a lot of work and it's hard and it's difficult and I can't do it myself.'
(P8)

A change in parents' attitudes towards the curriculum, teachers, and the school were noted. This change was observed among parents who routinely participated in the program and who had developed an understanding of the curriculum and the learning process. Consequently, the program positively influenced the development of parents' human capital. This knowledge acquisition appeared to be a crucial, underlying factor behind the changes in parent-child interactions that teachers observed.

Parent-child interactions

Changes in parents' attitudes not only appeared to have influenced their understanding of the curriculum and fostered a stronger relationship with the teachers, but equally important, this shift in attitude appears to have affected parent-child interactions. About two-thirds of teachers saw changes in the way that parents interacted in the classroom with their children over the course of the reading program. Three specific changes in parent-child interactions were found.

The first change was the improved unity of the parent-child relation in the classroom: According to teachers, by the end of the school year, many parents who regularly came to the reading program, interacted in a more positive way with their children. Teachers felt that this was a direct effect of the program that had occurred because of the parents' greater understanding of the curriculum and their realization that their children were working diligently. A few teachers reported that some of the parents were initially harsh with their children because they thought they were being lazy and not trying hard enough. However, as parents' attitudes towards the curriculum and their children changed, teachers reported that parents were much more supportive of their children and less harsh and critical of their efforts. One teacher noted that one particular parent

had a bit of attitude [towards the child] in the beginning that he had to get his work done. . . . Now I see that they operate as a family. (P6)

Other teachers shared similar experiences, stating that:

The first few times she was quite hard on him and she thought that he should strive for perfection. . . . Um, I know she's said to me that she doesn't understand why when he gets home from school that he gets so lazy and tired, but maybe now she does because she's knows that he works so hard at school. (P7)

In the beginning, she was really pushing him, asking him why he didn't get his work done. She was kind of harsh with him, and her attitude was that he should know things and she eventually just relaxed in a positive way. In the beginning, she was talking to him that way, and then she stepped back a little and he slowed down as well. (P10)

It also should be noted that changes in parent-child interaction are apt to indicate parents learning to imitate teacher-student interactions (which was a key objective of the reading program). About one-third of the teachers mentioned that by the end of the program parents were actively engaging in 'learning' from the teacher. Teachers said:

She would bring her questions to me. She is so motivated to help him. She showed a lot of interest in our lessons. I would give her a copy and him a copy. So she could ask him. She was willing to do that where she wasn't before. (P10)

She was so willing to help, and she would help with spelling and practice. . . . [I] showed her how to help. . . . I had them do one page and show me, so I could give him feedback. (P10a)

To reiterate, as parents became members of the classroom and felt more comfortable and relaxed, they developed a sense of belonging. At the same time they became educated, so to speak, about the curriculum, in addition to the educational strengths and weaknesses of their own children. This development of human capital, in turn, enabled enriched social capital between parents and their children, culminating to produce a positive change in parent-child interactions.

The second change that was noted in parent-child interactions was a decrease in the amount of physical space between the parent and child over the course of the school year. One teacher explained that:

I find that they have a lot of physical distance between them, like I've noted that. 'Wow, yeah,' like they're farther apart from each other than I would normally expect. That was somehow noticeable to me. So that seems to be very much the same. And um, when she's in the classroom during literacy time, they sit closer. . . . [pauses]. You know, I wish I would've had these [questions] at the beginning to kind of . . . then I could be a bit more intent on my observation. Like more focused on what is it, what can I be looking for. Um, I guess their interaction seems, I guess they get more comfortable, they seem to be more used to the whole routine of coming in and sitting at the desk together, reading together, looking over things and getting on with whatever activity we're doing. (P22)

This decrease in social distance was discussed by only two teachers; however, it is nevertheless an important finding to mention because it suggests an increase in the positive functioning of the parent-child relationship, which is indicative of an increase in social capital. In other words, it signifies a change in the level of connectedness and comfort between the parent and child in the school setting. Future research will need to address this important issue—examining the growth of

functional social resources and the development of social capital—and thus testing one of the foundational components of social capital theory.

One last change was noted between some parents and their children: The parents became firmer with their children after seeing their disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Only three teachers observed this change; however, this is reasonable because most students in a classroom are not continually disruptive. In all three instances, teachers felt that parents were at first over-protective of their child and did not encourage them, as one teacher put it, to ‘take responsibility for their actions’ (P6). Another teacher noted, it was always ‘someone else’s fault’ (P10) for their children’s disruptive behaviour. These three teachers perceived this to be the most positive change that they saw between these specific parents and their children. One teacher explained:

That was the most positive of all the changes in the parents. Last year he [the student] struggled a lot with friendships and things like that. . . . When he had difficulties getting along with other people or with work, it must’ve been someone else’s fault. She [the parent] never has him take responsibility for his own thing. This lets her see how he interacts with other people and lets her see how he does in school and how he does his work. It makes her realize that he has to take some ownership as well. P10

Similarly, another teacher comment that:

She [the parent] was able to see that Sarah is not always as good as she might think. Those have been highlighted because she is coming to school, but I don’t think she would have ever dreamt that her child would be like that. Her [the mother’s] attitude has been a lot more concerned [about her daughter’s behaviour]. (P15)

It should be noted that in some cases, parent-child interactions in the classroom were already viewed by teachers as unified. This represented a minority (three) of sets of parents-children.

Changes in parent-child interaction appear to be a direct result of the growth of social capital that occurred over the course of the reading program. These changes are interconnected with the attitude and behaviour student-observations that teachers discussed.

Observations of students

Teachers’ observations of students in the reading program fall into three main categories. Similar to the observations made about parents, the three student-observations also are interconnected. Before elaborating on these observations, it must be noted that teacher-observed changes that occurred during the 2005/06 school year are confounded by each child’s biological development.

Increased confidence

Nearly all teachers stated that students appeared more confident when their parents attended the reading program. They also noted that this confidence grew over the course of the school year. Teachers unanimously reported that students were

extremely happy, proud, enthusiastic, and excited when their parents attended lessons. One teacher summarized it nicely, saying:

I think that any time that the parents can come in and be involved in the child's learning. I think that a child's learning really benefits from it because they feel proud and happy and they have an opportunity to show their parents what they can do. (P1)

In agreement with this general attitude, many teachers made observations about specific students that illustrated their increased confidence level. Teachers echoed comments, such as:

I would say that when he knew his mom was coming, he would get really excited. He was very happy and bright and proud and smiling and glad that this mom was taking an interest in his school work. . . . His mother kind of made a huge difference in his enthusiasm and his excitement. (P8)

He's definitely a lot more confident. It's [not just] a result of his mom being at school but a result of his mom spending the time helping him out. (P16)

This change in attitude is likely linked to the development of social capital: the school-centred relationship between parent and child. Numerous teachers noted the development of this social capital in their discussions of parent-child 'bonding' and 'spending time together.' It is evident that the PIE program fostered social capital between parent and child. The effect of the enrichment of parent-child-based social capital was that children developed an interest in their education—an interest that teachers had not witnessed prior to their parents' participation in the reading program.

Interest in Education

Over the course of the PIE program, students took an increased interest in their education and had greater pride in their work. According to teachers, for most students, having their parent in their class inspired them to work harder to show their parent how intelligent they were. A common idea that teachers reiterated was that: 'he [the student] was a lot more proud of his work' (P16) after his parent started the program. One teacher specifically noted the recursive interplay between confidence building, capability, and interest in school. Although only one teacher made this specific comment, this idea was reflected in more than half of the interviews.

Teacher interviews also suggested that students' interest in education intensified the more their parents participated in the reading program. This was an underdeveloped concept, and a couple of teachers were hesitant to make a causal connection because of the child's biological development over the school year. Future quantitative research will need to examine such changes, controlling for biological development.

Teachers also described a quasi-causal link between parental learning and students' interest in their education. Some teachers specifically discussed the link between the change in the parent's attitude toward the curriculum/ teacher/ school and the change in the child's attitude towards school. Children imitate their parents' values and beliefs—their cultural capital—and therefore parental involvement in the

classroom illustrates to the importance that parents place on education, particularly that of their own children.

In addition, teachers discussed the power of parents learning alongside their children. In such situations, children can share a similar learning experience with their parents and consequentially deepen their bonds, or social capital. This bonding appeared to positively influence the children's interest in education and their improved well-being. Teachers agreed that parent-child interactions were enhanced by the reading program, which, in turn, was a confidence booster that not only influenced the student's work on the days when the parent was in the reading class, but also enhanced the student's general well-being (academic achievement and sociability) over the school year.

Improved well-being

Teachers reiterated that over the course of the reading program, student well-being appeared to improve in two ways: (1) heightened academic achievement, and (2) increased sociability. First, teachers found that students' reading achievement increased. One teacher, having taught the same student for two years in a row, stated that after being in the reading program:

Academically, she's improved *so much* this year. Her reading, written work, everything has just skyrocketed. (P9)

Another teacher stated that her students' grades had:

Gotten better and she's experienced a lot of success with her grades. Danielle is doing really well, so I think Danielle, now that she's doing well, she feels very successful. (P14)

Similarly a different teacher explained that one of her students 'has done really well and has showed a lot of improvement' (P11). Another found that her student 'had gone from . . . sitting around being silly to . . . sitting and listening and getting really good marks' (P6).

Most teachers concurred that student achievement levels had increased, which also was reflected in teacher-conducted achievement surveys (the results of which are not reported here) for each student in the reading program. Not only did teachers witness improved academic achievement, but they also noticed that students in the reading program developed their sociability. Some teachers recognized that students were generally 'happier' and were better able to express their feelings (of happiness). Teachers made comments such as:

I do notice that at the end of all the writing she's been doing lately, she's been writing 'I am happy.' (P1)

[She is] a little bit more expressive. A little bit more she [is] able to express her feelings and happiness. (P1)

On a related note, teachers also saw a change in students' ability to make friends. Teachers felt that this had to do with students' increased confidence:

He built many more friendships. He changed the way he interacted with people. He is so much happier and has more friends. (P10)

He's more confident and more happy at school. He used to play alone and didn't interact much with other kids, but now he plays around a lot and is more outgoing and has learned and is happy. (P16)

In terms of sociability, teachers also commented that for some students, their disruptive behaviours at the beginning of the school year had subsided by the end of the reading program. Teachers explained the experiences of particular students:

He gradually became calmer. He was a handful at the beginning. And now he's quite pleasant. . . . Just that at the beginning he was quite a handful at the beginning, very rambunctious, running around, um, not listening or following instructions. Now he's quite positive and he listens most of the time. (P18)

He used to be just, non-stop, interrupting, 'Ms. Smith, Ms. Smith!' every five seconds, but now he's really, really calmed down. He puts up his hand, I mean he's still a little rambunctious, but he's calmed down a whole bunch. (P23)

It is evident that the development of social capital between parent and child in the classroom setting had a strong positive influence on the child's well-being. This result also has been noted in other studies (Bassani, 2008; Desimone, 1999; Morrow, 1995). However, most of these studies have been quantitative and cannot capture descriptively for the reader social capital, its development, or its incredible influence that it has on improving child well-being. Rather, these studies examine the influence of structural and functional social resources—the two components of social capital. The results that have been presented and discussed in this paper illustrate in real terms, the invaluable effects that parent volunteerism in a child's classroom has on the child's well-being.

Discussion and conclusion

Teacher interviews illustrated that the PIE reading program has bridged parents into the classroom group effectively, which has enabled the development of social capital. Many parents were able to move from being out-group to in-group members, thereby enriching the social capital available to their children. Although not the focus of this paper, evidence illustrated the positive influence of social capital on other students and parent-teacher relationships.

From the interviews, it is evident that the development of parents' human capital—their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum—acted as a crucial mediator in the growth of social capital. When parents spent time in the classroom, they became educated about what their children were learning in class. Through the development of this human capital, social resources (relationships with their children, the teacher, and other students) were mobilized and social capital flourished. This is particularly interesting to note because, heuristically, social capital theory traditionally has been parent (adult)-centred in youth studies, and the influence of parents' human capital

tends to be indicative of their formal education. This research points out the importance of examining youths in a youth-centred context, such as the classroom. As the findings of this study indicate, knowing about and understanding a child's curriculum appears to have played an integral role in the development of social capital. Future studies should widen this conceptualization of human capital and integrate the development of parents' human capital into their theoretical understanding of youths' well-being.

Not only was there an increase in the development of social capital, but the positive effects of this growth on parent-child interaction, students' confidence, interest in education, and well-being were also integral findings of this study.

This research has generated new questions that future projects need to explore. In particular, this study has addressed the need to examine parents' perceptions of schooling. In today's society, where many parents are burdened with busy schedules, providing information to help parents aid their children's academic success would be invaluable.

A further examination of parents' perceptions is also invaluable in building a stronger social capital theory. In the development of social capital, perceptions determine the degree of functional social capital in a group. Negative, and furthermore, inaccurate perceptions will stifle the development of social capital, and thus perceptions are a mandatory component of functional social resources that need to be examined (when possible). Currently, social capital theory does not incorporate perceptions into the heuristic development of social capital but, rather, shared values. Perceptions and shared values are correlated, but they are quite separate entities. Group members may perceive that they have shared values when they actually may or may not. As the theory maintains, when values are not shared, group closure is weakened and social capital diminishes and cannot develop richly.

The incongruity between actual and perceived shared values already has been broached in education studies with the many critiques of Coleman's (1987, 1988, 1990) work, specifically with his comparison of social capital in private Catholic and public non-Catholic schools. The main critique was that it was not Catholic schools *per se* that developed more social capital, but rather schools where parents shared common values (such as educational rigour, cultural and or religious ethics, or a desire to be involved in the school community). Although an important critique of the theory, it has regrettably not altered the premises of the theory itself. As discussed elsewhere (Bassani 2003, 2007), this largely has to do with scholars using the *concept* of social capital in their research and not necessarily the theory. Heuristic work is still needed to advance the theory.

This study has documented the direct, positive effects of social capital (child, parent, parent-child, parent-teacher) on students, which is in line with the existing literature (Cronan et al., 1996; Desimone 1999; Fagan 1998; Morrow, 1995; Parcel & Dufur, 2001). Although all of the positive effects of the PIE program could not be addressed in this one study, the general student body also is likely to have benefited

from the parent-participation component of the PIE program. Future studies will need to address this issue.

The importance of the transition in status from out-group to in-group member in developing social capital has been highlighted. It is important to share this finding with school communities so that parents, teachers, and administrators can implement programs that maximize student learning. Theoretically, this is also noteworthy because social capital theory does not discuss in any depth the essential attribute of resource mobilization. Resource mobilization occurs when structural and functional social resources (potentially usable) are optimized and transformed into capital (usable) (Bassani, 2007). Resource mobilization is a complicated, individualized transformation, and I speculate that this is why it has been poorly conceptualized and not operationalized. Perhaps it does not have a standardized equation, though, as I have illustrated, for the development of social capital to take place (and thus the mobilization of resources into capital), individuals need to have in-group status (Figure 1b). Theoretical development is needed in this area, though, suffice to say, when an individual does not feel him or herself to be or to be becoming an insider, the development and/ or growth of social capital will be obstructed. In such instances, the group may be excessively closed (ie, a close-knit group such as an ethnic community or a visible minority group), thus thwarting the individual's transformation from outsider to insider (Bassani, 2008; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Ream, 2003).

On a related note, future research needs to examine differences among the three types of parent involvement in the school. As discussed earlier, social capital does not develop equally across the three types of parent involvement so we cannot expect the same student outcomes. This future work is important for guiding parents and schools in developing the richest levels of social capital. As parents and schools both continue to experience a heightened time crunch, such research will be particularly useful.

This study has identified the utility of the PIE program. The program has been found to enrich educational-based relationships between parents and children (and also between parents and teachers). The effects of the development of social capital are not held within the confines of the classroom; rather, social capital moves out of the classroom across three main bridges: students, parents, and teachers. It has a contagion effect that has the potential to influence all groups (and their members) to which the child, parent, and teacher belong. For example, as students begin to receive higher grades in reading, the encouragement may lead them to develop a stronger self esteem, which in turn may enable them to help other students, begin to read more, join in more community activities, and so forth. For parents, the effect of classroom social capital might enable them to communicate more productively with their children (both those inside and outside the reading program) in the home. For parents and teachers alike, the experiences that they share with colleagues or friends may encourage other adults to volunteer in classrooms or may encourage other teachers to (help) develop programs in their own schools and/ or classrooms. The possible contagion effect of the development of social capital (and its positive effect) is infinite. Extensive qualitative research needs to examine this effect.

Currently, the vast body of literature that examines social capital and youths' well-being is largely quantitative. Although quantitative research is highly useful in testing specific relationships, researchers face enormous measurement challenges. Researchers typically examine the influence of structural and/ or functional social resources on youth's well-being (eg, Bassani, 2008; Parcel & Dufur 2001; Teachman et al 1997; Zhou & Bankston 1994). At times, measures of social capital have been found not to be significant (when theoretically they should be significant) and scholars regularly discuss the confounded validity of their indicators. Within quantitative studies, the operationalization of social capital needs to be greatly enhanced because validity is a cornerstone of empiricism. Qualitative analyses, though time-consuming and limited in scope, need to be used not only to help understand the dynamics of social capital and its influence on youths, but also, equally important, such analyses can aid in the quantitative operationalization of social capital.

This study has illustrated the breadth of change that a small literacy program can have in a classroom and on parent-child relations. Social capital was found to have richly developed over the course of only seven months. Although other classroom-based programs may have experienced the same or a similar success, this is an amazing feat. It must be recognized that such programs can be successful only if teachers and principals are open to their creation. It is these gatekeepers, particularly teachers, who are the main advocates of such programs. Teachers, other school members, and PIE staff who participated in or helped out with the PIE program should be applauded for their diligence. Their seeding has generated immediate and future growth. Government agencies and other education funders should take note.

PIE and other similar literacy programs need continued funding and support. Our society has undergone significant demographic shifts and social changes. Fragmentation within our communities and families has been readily studied, the effects of which are often overwhelming for children. The majority of participants in the PIE program belong to a minority group (First Nations and visible ethnic minority immigrants). Marginalized children and their families are particularly prone to falling through the proverbial cracks in the school system and society more generally. Programs such as PIE are needed to help children and their families not only understand the education system, but also be included in the education process. At this time, more than ever, schools need to be a driving source of social capital to lessen the widening of inequalities for future generations. Programs such as PIE are proactive and have important short-term effects, which are apt to lead to long-term (and contagion) effects that are equally, if not more important.

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