

Crit Sum:
Contestation or Collaboration

Lewis, Amanda E., and Tyrone A. Forman (2002) *Contestation or Collaboration? A Comparative Study of Home-School Relations. Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 33(1):60-89.

Amanda E. Lewis and Tyrone A. Forman conducted a study which contrasted two elementary schools with regards to parental involvement at the school. These schools involved in the study were chosen because they have high parental involvement. One school, Forestview Elementary, is located in Northern California. It is a school with a middle-class suburban population that is 89% Caucasian. The other school, Metro Elementary, is located on the Eastern Seaboard next to a large city. Metro has a low-income population that is 52% Latino and 39% African American. This study found that the social and economic status of the parents affected the relationship and interaction of parents with teachers.

The study conducted by Lewis and Forman used pre-existing research to form part of their analysis. Lewis and Forman also spent four months in observing each school. During these four months, time was spent with the teachers in the classroom, in interviews with both parents and teachers, at PTA meetings, and at back to school nights.

At Forestview Elementary, they found that parents wanted to be in the classroom with their children. The parents did not realize how hard it was for teachers to plan activities around the demands of the parents. The parents wanted the teachers to be open with them and to let them come to the class whenever it was convenient for the parent. One teacher, who went to all of the P.T.A meetings, announced to other faculty that he would no longer attend the meetings because he felt that the parents did not welcome his point of view. This was because there were disagreements amongst the parents and teachers on how to educate the children. The parents of the children at Forestview got together and decided not to contribute more money to the school.

This decision by the parents was made without realizing that it not only affected the teachers, but the student as well, because it limited the school's ability to obtain classroom supplies.

The principle tried to make the teacher's jobs easier and get the parents involved, but he had no control over the P.T.A meetings. This often resulted in fights with the parents. The parents started making changes without permission from the school. For example, if the parents found something that needed to be fixed at the schools, then the parents would fix it by-passing the proper channels.

At Metro Elementary the parent teacher relationship differed greatly from that of Forestview Elementary. The authors noted that both teachers and parents were learning and growing from their interactions. For example if a teacher needed help from a parent they would ask for help. It was also understood between the parents and the teachers that if the parent needed help they could ask the teachers. The school was open to parental opinions. Often teachers and parents collaborated on how the students should be taught. The teachers wanted the parents to be involved as much as possible at home with their child's education; they used parent/teacher conference as a way to involve and communicate with parents.

Parents at Forestview Elementary undermined the power and authority of teachers. They were not intimidated by the school, and considered themselves an asset to the school. The teachers at Forestview were insecure about their power, authority, and control over their classrooms. These teachers were undervalued by the parents and taken for granted. Problems were created because of the teachers' struggle with the parents over authority and control which drew the focus away from the students. On the other hand, at Metro Elementary, because the parents were not economically well-off, in order to keep the families involved with the school, the school had to use unconventional methods to obtain parental involvement. It overcame

cultural and economic barriers to form partnerships between parents and teachers by creating flexible meeting schedules, using open communication between the parents and teachers, and providing babysitting services while parents attended meetings with the teachers. The teachers at Metro Elementary worked to involve and empower parents in their child's education. They did this from a position of power and authority.

The two schools are very different with their parent/teacher relations. Forestview Elementary teachers were undermined by the parents. They felt that they had no control or respect from parents. The parents felt that they could do whatever they wanted because they were in control of the school. This attitude from the parents created negative feelings from the teachers toward the parents.

In contrast, the Metro teachers felt respected by parents. They felt like they had control and authority over their classrooms. This attitude made teachers more willing to involve the parents and work with the parents for the benefit of the children.

(This summary was taken from a paper written by Katrina Jenkins a student at USU)