A CROSS-CULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN
EDUCATION IN POHNPEI, FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

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Abstract

Do Pacific Island parents in Pohnpei have a problem with their American style education system? If so, what is the nature of the problem? A six-part typology of parental involvement developed by Dr. Joyce Epstein provided the framework for focus group discussions and interviews with Pohnpeian parents and educators on the topic.

Western research methods, however, had to be applied carefully and with cross-cultural sensitivity to encourage Pohnpeian participants to reshape the framework and make it meaningful to their situation. Twelve focus groups discussed the six categories of parental involvement, so that two groups talked separately about the same topic. Three principals from elementary schools in varying community contexts were interviewed.

The results were rich in qualitative data, and to understand the Pohnpeians’ responses required analysis and interpretation through multiple lenses. The perspectives selected were U.S. research on effective practices as well as barriers to parental involvement, the history of Western education in Pohnpei, the differences between formal Western and traditional Pohnpeian education, and the sociolinguistic manifestations of authority in which Pohnpeian schools currently operate.

Notes from focus groups and videotapes of group reports were transcribed and translated in interactive sessions with Pohnpeian language informants. The translation process was the first review of the data. Next, summaries of each group and group report were written. Later, a composite profile for each categorical aspect of parental involvement was written by combining the summaries. Interviews were reconstructed.
from field notes and the written version was given to the principals for their review and comment.

The findings were conclusive. Parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools is marked by contention. Inadequate information and unilateral decisions from the schools seriously hamper communications. The nature of the problem, however, rests with the communication structures through which decisions are made. In matters of community concern, like schools, Pohnpeian parents are most comfortable with a hierarchically structured means of consensus-building. The American-style school system, with notions of individual and equal access to decision making, stymies rather than advances communications. The lack of synthesis between the two methods of communication is keeping schools and communities apart.
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Figure 1: Pohnpeï, Federated States of Micronesia

* Maps reproduced with permission from Pacific Resources for Education and Learning Resource Center
Chapter 1: Overview and Research Questions

After more than 50 years of American-led public education, the average seventh grade student in the Federated States of Micronesia or the Republic of the Marshall Islands reads English at a second grade level.\(^1\) This is a dismal finding and speaks to the difficulty of implementing public education in the American-affiliated Pacific islands. Nevertheless, in spite of the legion of problems faced by educational systems in Micronesia, my experience there convinces me that faith in the value of formal education remains strong. Families dutifully send their youngsters off to decrepit buildings without water or electricity with the expectation that the schools will teach something useful. On their part, the region’s new governments continue to allocate a high percentage of scarce resources to education.

From a fiscal perspective, parental involvement is a relatively inexpensive way to bolster educational performance. As I will detail later, research shows that both teaching and learning improve when parents are involved in schools. Since money to support education is in short supply in Micronesia, any means of enhancing school performance with minimal monetary outlay is welcome. However, parental involvement does not seem to be especially strong.

Much research has been done on student success in schools, but parents in Micronesia have not needed the expertise of researchers to point out to them that their children are not learning as much as they could. Recriminations between schools and communities are rife. As evidenced by the tone and comments I heard during the

August 2002 School Community Partnership Forum in Pohnpei, parents are irate that the school system is not doing its job. From their perspective, school administrators and teachers rejoin that parents do little or nothing to support their efforts.

As Principal Investigator of a federally funded parental involvement project in Pohnpei, I had an interest in examining the current state of parental involvement to see where improvement might occur. Yet while I felt the current tension between families and schools in Pohnpei, I really had not learned enough to understand whether parents hold themselves apart and if so, why. As an outsider, an American raised with Western cultural values, it is difficult to grasp the attitudes of Pohnpeian parents toward formal education. However my cross-cultural experience working in the field combined with training in Western approaches to research put me in a position to examine the topic more closely.

On the other hand, my Western training and position as an outsider increased the potential for me to misinterpret the situation. Also influencing the situation was my role as a representative of an agency that channeled U.S. Federal funds to Pohnpei to improve parental involvement. To keep the money coming in, it would be to Pohnpeians’ advantage to agree that a problem existed. A basic first question, then, must be one that challenged my own assumptions. Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools?

Documented evidence is thin. In an introduction to their language arts curriculum, a Pohnpeian educator notes, “Parents see education as the school’s
business, not theirs.” On several occasions, Micronesian friends and colleagues of mine have related parents’ comments to them, “You’re getting paid to run the schools, so do it.” Nevertheless, despite this seeming disinterest in school operations, parents send their well-scrubbed little ones off to school daily.

Is there a gap between home and school? Pohnpeian parents had an answer. For me to make meaning of their response, however, I had to establish a context that I could understand. Therefore I chose to interpret their answers through multiple lenses: U.S. research on barriers to parental involvement, the history of Western education in Pohnpei, the differences between formal Western and traditional Pohnpeian forms of education, and the power structure in which the Pohnpeian school system operates.

To verify that a problem exists, I found it helpful to review research done in the United States on barriers to parental involvement in education. The main issues raised by U.S. researchers provide points for comparison and contrast with the situation in Pohnpei. However, one must be cautious in applying explanations based on the U.S. social context to other cultural environments. In terms of how Pohnpeian parents feel about parental involvement, their voice must articulate the issue.

Reference to U.S. research would help me interpret what I heard, but I did not want U.S. research priorities to direct my investigation. Replicating U.S. research would be counterproductive to determining barriers to parental involvement in Pohnpei. For example, one line of U.S. research considers parents’ educational

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experiences. Negative experiences as students correlate to limited parental involvement as adults.³ A survey of Pohnpeian parents could find the extent to which their experiences with school had been negative, and whether those experiences distance them from the schools their children attend. The results could mirror U.S. research but still not identify the critical issue in Pohnpe. Therefore, rather than using U.S. research as models, I used the topics of investigation as references to help my understanding of what Pohnpeian parents had to say.

Other contextual factors that were useful to inform my assessment of parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools included the history of Western education in Pohnpei, the differences between Western formal education and Pohnpeian indigenous forms, and the patterns of authority that regulate traditional life. An historical review gave a longitudinal perspective to the involvement of Pohnpeian parents in Western style education. Comparing informal Pohnpeian and formal Western formats of education added local Pohnpeian specifics to my reading of U.S. research into home-school dichotomies. Finally, a consideration of traditional Pohnpeian lines of authority provided insight as to how the current educational system operates and how parents interact with it. In Chapter 2 I elaborate on these contextual factors.

As I began to consider approaches to my research I realized that if Pohnpeian parents confirmed that there were issues with parental involvement, they and I would have to be speaking in the same terms in order for me to understand their concerns.

Before I could ask, "What is the nature of the problem between home and school in Pohnpei?" I would need to propose an operational definition that both the parents and I could refer to. In other words, before parents identified a problem with parental involvement, they and I needed to agree on what parental involvement was. Then the same set of contextual factors -- research, history, varying forms of education, and patterns of authority -- would help me understand their responses.

For an operational definition, I turned again to American research. In Chapter 3 I describe the typological definition of parental involvement that has evolved out of years of research into the topic. For purposes of my investigation, I turned to U.S. research studies for two purposes: first, to gain background information on barriers to parental involvement and, second, to find a definition of parental involvement to use with Pohnpeian parents as a point of common understanding.

However, using U.S.-based research tools in a cross-cultural study presents a dilemma. To what extent could I analyze the findings of my own research, as expressed by Pohnpeian parents, on the basis of American research? I would have to monitor the process carefully.

I found it incumbent to question the appropriateness and explanatory helpfulness of American research to the situation in Pohnpei. Therefore, in addition to my basic content questions, "Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei's schools and, if so, what is the nature of the problem?" there was another tier of questions to ask. First, concerning barriers to parental involvement, which issues identified through U.S. research illuminate the situation as identified by Pohnpeian parents? Second, concerning the American-based research definition of
parental involvement, how useful was it to Pohnpeian parents to frame their discussions?

Further adding to the complexity of cross-cultural research is the difficulty of obtaining valid data. An acceptable and effective method in one cultural context may be counterproductive in another. For example, in a later section on method I will argue that written surveys, a mainstay of American research, are ineffective when doing research in Micronesia. Nevertheless, Western research methods are what I know. From the outset, however, I realized I had to be cautious that method did not overshadow the Pohnpeian voice of the subjects.

To encourage a local voice to emerge, I knew that I, as a Western outsider, had to choose and adapt methods to the cultural milieu in which the study took place. To choose among methods I first weighed the pros and cons of their application in Pohnpei. What would work and what would not? Once I chose a particular method, I needed to delve further and take into consideration as many cultural factors as I knew to insure it would work. It is not enough, for example, to determine that individual interviews can be effective in Pohnpei without knowing the impact of the logistics of setting them up, the constraints on speaking freely, and even the age and gender relationship of interviewer to interviewee. In Chapter 4, I detail the cross-cultural factors I took into considerations to make my research effective.

Choosing an effective method is an important step in any investigation, but making the choice takes on particular characteristics in a cross-cultural study. With due diligence and respect toward the cultural environment in which the research will be conducted, a cross-cultural researcher hopes to make a wise decision. The choice
of method is important enough that it merits a summary question of its own -- did the method produce useful data?

To gather information about parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools, I conducted focus groups and individual interviews. The two techniques proved very productive, so much so that a number of themes and local models emerged. In Chapter 5 I analyze twelve focus group discussions and toward the end of that chapter I summarize the themes that emerged. In Chapter 6, I review the interviews I held with principals from schools in three different communities. At the end of that chapter, I summarize the creative and purposeful efforts the principals are making and present them as models to improve parental involvement in Pohnpei.

A cross-cultural exploration of parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools is a complex endeavor. In order to draw reliable conclusions, I had to make decisions and use my judgment on how to conduct the study as well as how to analyze the data. Therefore I formed questions that addressed both content and process.

Regarding the way I prepared for and conducted my examination of parental involvement, I posed a set of three process questions. Taken together, the answers to these questions articulate the cross-cultural approach I followed. First, which American-based research initiatives in parental involvement are relevant to the situation as articulated by Pohnpeian parents? Second, how helpful was the American-based definition of parental involvement to Pohnpeian parents’ discussions on the topic? Third, how well did the method work to elicit useful data?

Finally, I asked a further set of four questions to be able to assess contemporary parental involvement in education in Pohnpei. First, using data from
focus groups, I wanted to know what themes emerged from discussions among Pohnpeian parents on parental involvement. Second, from the interviews, I wanted to identify examples of effective parental involvement that have developed in Pohnpei. Answering what themes emerged and what examples have developed resulted in a good description of the status quo of parental involvement. The profile of parental involvement gave me enough information on which to base my assessment, which I present as the answers to the fundamental questions of my study. Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools and, if so, what is the nature of the problem?
Chapter 2: Contextual Factors Relevant to Parental Involvement in Pohnpei

Barriers to parental involvement: U.S. research

To a large extent, the positive role of parental involvement is intuitive. In a conversation with me the former president of the Pohnpei State PTA, the late Cosmas Weilbacher said, “Kids learn better when parents are involved.” But are Pohnpeian parents involved in the formal education of their children? Or are there barriers that keep them apart from the American-style school system? To begin investigating the status of parental involvement in Pohnpei, the most expeditious place for me to start is with the research published in the United States on barriers to parental involvement in U.S. schools.

In the U.S., the notion of barriers became a topic of inquiry with the realization that the benefits of parental involvement cannot accrue when families distance themselves from schools. Most studies assume a cultural gap between home and school, ranging in severity from a complete lack of mutual understanding through a mismatch between home and school teaching and learning styles to a dissonance between professional educators and lay parents.

Many American parents may have good reason to be suspicious of the intentions of schools to engage them. Parents who do not get involved are often those whose own education was unsatisfactory or who have had bad experiences with their children at school. Salend and Taylor found that prior experiences with
discrimination or disrespect often keep parents away. At times, the problem is as much historical as personal. For example, Cockrell discovered a general distrust of schools among Native Americans who perceived schools as alien institutions, instruments of a culture that had discriminated against them in the past.

Another personal factor to consider is the individual teacher. Greenwood and Hickman place teachers they interviewed in two camps. One consists of those who question whether or not the benefits of parental involvement outweigh the problems involved. The other is comprised of teachers who do not believe they have to ability to engage parents more actively, even though as teachers they would like to.

Clearly, immigrants who come from a culture with different systems of education may find it intimidating and confusing when they place their children in a new educational environment. Looking at barriers to involvement faced by immigrant Japanese, Shoho identified a number of inhibiting factors. The parents were embarrassed by their inability to communicate in English and their limited educational background. They were unfamiliar with American schooling and the expectations for involvement. Also, as newcomers on the low end of the economic ladder, their priority was economic survival. It seems reasonable that a similar set of

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factors relating to involvement with schools may be generalized to other immigrant groups entering the country under similar circumstances.

Lily Wong Fillmore points out that Chinese families, despite a language barrier, tend to promote their children's success in school because home values and ways of learning match those typical of mainstream middle class school systems. These Chinese parents discipline their children toward learning. On the other hand, Fillmore found that children from working class white, African American, and Mexican-American families enter school having fewer experiences with adults in terms of interactive literacy and direct instruction. Fillmore argues that there are home values that may promote or inhibit children's classroom success.

Weisner, Gallimore, and Jordan detail the peer interaction patterns of Hawaiian families to show how a mismatch of home and school cultures results. Hawaiian children experience what the authors call horizontal socialization, where affectionate, adult-directed child rearing practices end at an early age. Older siblings become responsible for taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, resulting in a situation where peers are the dominant socializing influence. Maintaining positive social relationships becomes a primary objective. Interactions with adults tend to be apprehensive, that is, the child does not look toward adults as mentoring individuals, but as authoritarian enforcers whose moods must be monitored. Mainstream schools, on the other hand, expect children to have experienced vertical socialization patterns.

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where children spend more time with adults, rather than peers, as their mentors/teachers. Children who have experienced vertical socialization enter school predisposed to interact with adults as teachers, rather than as disciplinarians.

Parent alienation from schools due to their own experiences and teacher hesitation to interact with parents are barriers that can apply in any educational environment. They are factors to keep in mind when questioning the lack of involvement in Pohnpei. Also, the literature on immigrant parents’ successful support of their children’s education is informative and research into home-school dichotomies is useful. However both approaches offer limited explanatory power to why Pohnpeian parents stay aloof from a school system staffed and managed by their own community.

The effort to understand why schools and parents are not working together in Pohnpei requires consideration of other factors that make the educational environment there unique. While the research on Hawaiian families is helpful in showing how adult-child interactions at home and at school may vary by culture, it doesn’t contrast the classroom format of American education with indigenous Hawaiian methods of education. The collections of the Pacific Collection at the University of Hawaii Hamilton Library and the library at the Micronesian Seminar hold valuable resources that document Pohnpei’s indigenous non-Western approaches to education. Because traditional education is still important in Pohnpei, it is useful to look into the forms it takes and see how they coincide or differ from classroom methods.
An additional complication that contributes to the unique situation of education in Pohnpei is the socio-political context, in particular the way decisions are made. Formal education is the responsibility of the democratically elected government. Simultaneously, Pohnpei maintains a strong traditional governance structure as well, one based on chiefly prerogatives. The incongruities in Pohnpei between traditional and democratic systems of governance create tension that leaves education unfortunately caught in the middle.

Finally, since public formal education is an alien institution, it is helpful to consider historical interactions with outside forms of education generally in Micronesia. The historical research done by Jesuit Fr. Francis Hezel, is particularly valuable. Fr. Hezel has worked as an educator in Micronesia for over thirty years and now heads the Micronesian Seminar, a research organization with headquarters in Pohnpei. Although his histories primarily trace the political interactions of foreign powers in Micronesia, he notes where and how outside notions of education became established.

As well as those factors identified through U.S. research, each of these three topics -- history, lines of authority that impact education, and cross-cultural differences in educational formats -- is an area that raises barriers to parental involvement in Pohnpei. I will review what we know about these three additional elements now.

A brief history of formal education in Micronesia

An historical perspective helps understand the purpose Micronesians find for Western-style schooling, as well as why they may feel separated from it. Formal
education in Micronesia has its roots in a curious mix of nineteenth century missionary, commercial, and colonial endeavors. While the missionaries were concerned for people's souls, businesses saw a chance to make money and colony-hungry countries in competition with each other felt a need to control the area to the exclusion of others. Formal education in the region was begun by outsiders largely to promote and support these varying interests. Micronesia's public school systems, as we know them today, are still sorting out the positives and negatives of that history.

Guam had a more continuous association with the West than other islands in the region, and has remained somewhat apart, even though geographically a Micronesian island. For several centuries, the Spanish used Guam as a port of resupply on their travel from the Philippines to Mexico, and from there overland to the Atlantic and on to Spain. Unlike Guam, the remaining islands had little continuing interaction with outside cultures after Magellan and other Spaniards established their trade route in the sixteenth century.

When whale oil became a profitable commodity in the nineteenth century, American ships began plying the Pacific to hunt whales and life in Pohnpei began to change rapidly. Pohnpei became a popular provisioning and recreation point, with as many as 50 whalers a year stopping there during the 1850's.\textsuperscript{10} The whalers exchanged guns and metal tools for wood, water and women, and incidentally introduced smallpox, influenza and sexually transmitted diseases. Because the islanders had no resistance to Western diseases, their populations declined drastically.

Physically and psychologically, the islanders had to be wondering what was happening.

On the heels of the carousing whalers came the scolding missionaries with a powerful new spiritual belief system. Fresh from their success in converting the “heathen” Hawaiian, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent three couples to Pohnpei in 1852.11 As soon as possible they established their first schools with a Protestant thrust toward literacy to enable Pohnpeians to read the Bible. Within fifteen years the missionaries had converted most of Pohnpei, and their schools had produced Pohnpeian missionaries to proselytize in Chuuk and the Marshall Islands. By 1885, a network of 40 churches stretched from Chuuk through the Marshalls, and over 4,000 Micronesians had been baptized and taught the fundamentals of reading.12

The victory was far from easy, however, and far from complete. The Protestant missionaries were engaged in a complex political sparring match where commercial interests and traditional chiefs feinted and dodged around their work. The chiefs were suspicious of the power that the missionaries held over the people. Traders and whalers were indignant that the do-gooders were spoiling their profits and fun. For the most part, the missionaries gave in to the chiefs. In spite of their tendency to conflate New England style democracy with religion, the missionaries found it prudent to work within the social structures of the islands and gain the chiefs as their allies. Toward the sailors and traders, the missionaries remained aloof and censurrious. They felt the islanders were being cheated in their exchanges so as part

of their educational effort they introduced the Pohnpeians to the rudiments of trade.\textsuperscript{13} Up to then, all exchanges had been through barter, with the better part of the bargain going to the outsiders. The missionaries taught the utility of currency as a means of setting value, a concept that underlies a monetary economy. Whereas a cask of water might have brought a knife in barter, it would now bring in a dollar, which in turn could buy two or three knives.

The Protestant missionaries didn’t have the islands all to themselves for long. The Spanish government soon sent in Catholic friars, but the motivation was more geopolitical than reverent. In 1885 newly unified Germany flexed its imperialistic muscle by following German trading companies into the Pacific and annexed the Marshall Islands. Germany also threatened to annex the Caroline Islands: Yap, Palau, Chuuk and Pohnpei. Spain, however, reasserted its centuries old, European-acknowledged rights to the islands. To back up its claim, the Spanish moved to set up a Western administrative office in Yap and an eastern headquarters in Pohnpei. Accompanying the governors and their few troops were Capuchin friars, who immediately set up their own schools.\textsuperscript{14}

While the American Protestant mission schools focused on young adults with the aim of having them become missionaries themselves, the Capuchins opened their schools for children. In a four-hour school day, they taught Spanish, religion, geography and arithmetic. The Catholic schools were well received in Palau and Yap, but became involved in the political morass of Pohnpei. The Capuchins were in a

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 254.
contradictory position. They had to support the Spanish overlords while converting the Pohnpeians who opposed them. At the same time, they supported Protestant missionaries’ efforts to champion the Pohnpeians while competing with them for converts.15

Much of the contentiousness between the Spanish Catholics and the American Protestants subsided at the end of the Spanish American War in 1899 when Germany paid Spain just over $4 million dollars for all Micronesia except Guam.16 The Germans issued an edict that all religious schools be conducted in German. To comply, the Spanish Capuchins transferred their schools to their German counterparts, and the American missionaries turned their work over to a German Protestant group, the Liebenzell Mission.17

The German colonial government did nothing in the way of establishing schools. However, establishing local police forces served an educational as well as an administrative function. Local policemen had limited duties, but they received some vocational training and learned German.18

With the outbreak of World War I in Europe in August 1914, the Japanese moved quickly in the Pacific and pushed the Germans out of Micronesia by September.19 Like the Germans, the Japanese imposed their language as the medium of instruction in all schools. Unlike the Germans, however, the Japanese were unwilling to leave formal education to missionaries. They closed mission schools

15 Ibid., 35 – 39.
16 Ibid., 95
17 Ibid., 104.
18 Ibid., 107.
19 Ibid., 146–149.
throughout Micronesia, and began the first system of public education. By 1918, twenty-two public schools had been established with nearly seventeen hundred island children attending. Eventually more than half the school age population, consisting of children from eight to fourteen, attended six-hour school days. Education was limited to three years, although selected students could attend another two years at central schools on the larger islands.  

Schoolwork consisted of arithmetic, handicraft skills like weaving and carving, but class time focused primarily on Japanese language. The Japanese were more concerned than the Spanish or Germans had been with inculcating the islanders with their culture. Unlike either of the previous colonial powers, the Japanese expected to bring large numbers of their own people to settle in the islands. In 1937, there were approximately 50,000 Micronesians in the Carolines, Marianas, and Marshalls. By that time, however, 62,000 Japanese had moved into the islands, and that number increased to 93,000 just before World War II. Education, under the Japanese, was directed toward developing an island population that could support and communicate with the immigrants who intended to stay.  

The Japanese administration set up separate schools for children of the settlers who moved into Micronesia. Japanese children received six years of education, with the possibility of two more for exceptional students. Micronesian students were prohibited from attending the Japanese schools. The number of schools for Japanese

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20 Ibid., 151–152.
21 Ibid., 210
students continued to increase during the 1930's, so that by 1937 the number of Japanese children in schools was twice that of Micronesians.  

With the onset of World War II, the impact of global rivalries again reverberated in the islands, this time in a devastating manner. By 1944 all public schools were closed as the battles for the islands swept across Micronesia.

In the wake of World War II the United States Navy assumed administrative control of Micronesia with the responsibility of re-establishing schools. Unlike the Japanese, however, the Americans had no intention of moving significant numbers of people into Micronesia, nor of incorporating the islands into the political and economic life of their country. The United States' primary concern with the region was strategic, so while given the responsibility of reopening schools, the Navy was given very little budget to do so. The educational policy adopted by the Navy was one of minimal support. Any village was welcome to open a school, as long as it built and staffed it. Nevertheless, showing that they had detected a value to formal education, islanders constructed 152 schools by 1947, more than six times the number of schools that had been available to them during the Japanese administration.

While construction and staffing were left up to local communities, the U.S. Navy supplied textbooks, mostly second-hand U.S. mainland materials. Because most of the local teachers spoke or read little to no English, the medium of instruction was the local vernacular, and one can only guess at the content conveyed. Realizing a need for teachers, the Navy began recruiting young people to attend teacher training

22 Ibid., 193.
23 Ibid., 226.
programs. These became intermediate schools, and the most promising students were sent on to Guam for further training.\textsuperscript{24}

Although the Micronesian islands had been designated a trusteeship under the United Nations in 1947, their administration remained under the control of the U.S. Navy until 1951, when responsibility for implementing the trusteeship agreement was transferred to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Most Navy policies concerning education were continued, but the small budgets allocated for overall administration were decreased even further. Within the budgetary constraints, the Trust Territory education department maintained a staff of about twenty Americans who taught at intermediate schools and visited elementary classrooms throughout the islands.\textsuperscript{25}

During the 1950's the Interior Department promoted local control of schools, advocating the use and teaching of vernacular languages and the development of locally focused curriculum. The most serious obstacle to effective schools remained the lack of trained teachers. Building on the strategy of using intermediate schools as the source of teachers, one public high school, the Pacific Islands Central School, was opened in 1952. It enrolled about 150 students from throughout the Trust Territory. The school first operated in Chuuk, moving to Pohnpei in 1959 and while limited in the number of students it served, the school proved to be a training ground for both educational and political leaders for Micronesia.\textsuperscript{26}

By 1961, only three United Nations trusteeships remained, the Pacific Islands being one. While the U.S. Department of the Interior was maintaining policies of

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 259 – 261.  
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 283 – 289.  
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 291.
slow growth in Micronesia, the international community was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with American administration. In the context of post-war de-colonization and Cold War tension, a UN report that criticized the United States’ handling of the Trust Territory contributed to the new Kennedy administration taking a new approach to the islands. Education became a priority, and money began to flow, both for the construction of schools and the hiring of American contract teachers. The construction of over 500 classrooms was started. The intermediate schools were all expanded into four-year high schools, and by 1966, four hundred American contract teachers were in Micronesian classrooms. By policy, English became the medium of instruction and consideration for local control of schools and curriculum was displaced by central control of all aspects of education.27

Next came the Peace Corps. From 1966 to 1968, almost 1,000 Peace Corps volunteers were assigned to Micronesia. By the late 1960’s practically every school had some American presence, and as American influence became pervasive, local input declined. Reversing earlier policies where communities paid their own teachers, the central Trust Territory government now standardized and paid salaries. As the numbers of schools and enrollments increased, more local teachers were hired, making education one of the Trust Territory’s major employers.28

The centralized systems of education were incorporated into the new governments that negotiated political arrangements that ended the Trust Territory status of Micronesia. The Northern Mariana Islands opted for commonwealth status, but the others entered compacts of free association. The Marshall Islands became the

27 Ibid., 297 - 303.
28 Ibid. 312 - 316.
Republic of the Marshall Islands. Palau became the Republic of Palau, and Pohnpei, Kosrae, Chuuk, and Yap combined and gained political independence as the Federated States of Micronesia. All the Freely Associated States granted the United States exclusive military oversight of their vast ocean area. Though new in name, the governments maintained the bureaucratic frameworks set up under American tutelage. These have remained for the most part intact, and remain the operational model today.

To the extent that they mention education, Hezel’s political histories of Micronesia show schooling as an imposed institution, controlled by outsiders and separate from local communities. In spite of the shift to local control, the separation of community and schools continues today. David Hanlon’s history of Pohnpei, *Upon a Stone Altar*, points out two purposes that Pohnpeians found for adapting Western institutions, including education. One was to mediate and modify the influence of outside forces. Although outside Pohnpei, a good recent example is the Western trained Palauan lawyers who led their community in resisting U.S. defense interests by inserting a nuclear-free clause in their Constitution. A second purpose for formal education was to use it for social mobility. Hanlon points out that members of low clans saw a way to increase personal prestige by studying with the missionaries. Although education did not supplant birth-right as determiner of social position, it provided a heretofore unavailable alternative. However, regardless of the purpose they found in formal education, Pohnpeians were content to leave the format and instructional content to outsiders.

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Contrasting forms of education

The history of education in Micronesia shows us that the islanders see a purpose for formal education but continue to view it as an outside institution. Even though schooling is a local endeavor, it is still regarded as something foreign. Traditional education, that is, education indigenous to Pohnpeian culture, is quite different from Western-style education. The dissimilarities contribute to Pohnpeians viewing the latter as alien.

To look at non-Western Pohnpeian education, it is useful to consider Edwin Smith’s three aspects of indigenous education. Smith distinguishes unconscious education, the type of learning that goes on in play among children, from informal education where children observe and imitate for an adult audience. In indigenous contexts, formal education is comprised of learning where a child is apprenticed to a master. Each of these aspects of indigenous education is evident in Pohnpei. Play and peer learning are prominent among Pohnpeian children. The practice of horizontal socialization, where children spend more time with each other than under adult supervision is the norm. The fear of ridicule is an important motivator for young children, to the extent that a child’s cohort of peers handles even toilet training. Play often mimics adult behavior and when a child’s interest or curiosity is noticed, mindful adults encourage it. The unconscious education of play typically moves seamlessly into informal education through experiential, side-by-side interactions with adults. Pohnpeian children will observe unquestioningly, try out the observed

skill privately, and when proficient, participate in adult activities. Formal education takes place when a child is recognized as capable to take on more advanced learning in areas like medicine or navigation. In these cases the same pattern of observation occurs, but various types of testing will precede practice.

In contrast to one’s rank, which is limited by birth in Pohnpeian life, one’s area of expertise is open to personal interest and aptitude within social parameters. Gender, for example, has great influence on what one learns. Generally men hunt and fish while women plant and gather. Also, areas of arcane knowledge like advanced navigation and medicine are guarded and not available to everyone. Nevertheless, indigenous Pohnpeian education is remarkably fluid and responsive to the individual and is guided by careful parent and community assessment of skills and abilities.

Considering just a few of the obvious educational differences helps us understand why Pohnpeians might distance themselves from American style formal education. Education in the traditional community setting is individualized and focused. Parents and other adult family members assess children’s predispositions and talents and encourage them to pursue a specific task-based educational aim. In contrast, Western formal education as practiced in Pohnpei’s elementary schools is depersonalized and broad. All children receive the same course of study where learning is text-based and covers a wide range of topics. Teachers are authorized to assess students’ mastery and progress, but parents are left out of the process. “School” and the skills necessary for success in it are the charge of adults who may or may not have a family relationship with the child.

Indigenous Pohnpeian education takes place in the context of the family and is conveyed orally and by example. Therefore listening, memory and observation are critical learning skills. In contrast, Western knowledge is conveyed through text, so reading is the crucial skill. Learning occurs in a building apart from the daily routine of life. With a teacher in class a Pohnpeian boy reads about fishing. With his uncle in a canoe, he learns to fish.

Knowledge in indigenous Pohnpeian education is integrated. As a boy learns to fish, he also learns the habitats and life cycle of the fish, the place of each fish in history and spirituality, customs regarding the disposition of the catch, and more. A holistic mode of comprehension is important to becoming well educated. In contrast, text-based Western learning is compartmentalized, and the well-educated person is one who can analyze and synthesize information.

The Western practice of formal education displaces family members from the process. Teachers are outside the family, and the locus of learning is a building apart from the home. Western literacy demands a different set of learning skills from orality, resulting in a different notion of what marks an educated person. To some extent, then, the differences in educational form and content contribute to Pohnpeian parents keeping apart from the Western system of schooling. They feel competent as instructors in traditional matters but lack confidence in conveying knowledge that is structured so dissimilarly from their experience.

At this point I would like to relate a personal anecdote that reflects how Pohnpeian traditional education is embedded in social custom. A Pohnpeian colleague of mine, Martin Weirlangt, died of cancer early in 2002. I was in Pohnpei at
the time of his funeral and was able to pay my respects to his family and observe the intricacies of a funeral in Pohnpei.

Funerals typically last four days. Day one is the day of burial and day two the time for friends and family to gather. Day three is “fish day”, a special custom where people bring fish to the family in place of the pig, yams, and sakau (kava) that are donated on the first two days. Day four is for clean up, as all the previous days’ events are held at the home of the deceased and the family is by custom prohibited from more than a cursory clean up after the hundreds of mourners have participated in three days of funerary events.

The day of the burial I arrived at Martin’s family’s home at about ten in the morning. Pohnpeian houses have little use for furniture so it was not surprising to see the casket placed on the floor with mourners dressed in black sitting on mats in front of it. The women were keening as church groups just outside the window took turns singing hymns. After paying my respects I joined a growing crowd outside who were gathering on benches provided for the occasion.

At right angles to the house was a large open-sided building known as the nahs. Most Pohnpeian homes have a similar meeting place where people gather for formal and informal socializing. During the funeral, the nahs was the focal point of the ceremonies marking Martin’s death. The highest ranking men in Martin’s family sat on a raised platform at the front, each with a retainer, traditionally a bodyguard, seated at right angles in front of them. While the men of rank could stand and change position as they liked, the retainers had to maintain the same sitting posture for the
whole day. One by one, the men of rank gave speeches and the Nanhmwarki of Kitti, the paramount chief, conducted the transfer of Martin’s titles to his younger brother.

While the speeches were in progress, a steady procession of offerings arrived. For any funeral, gifts of a live pig, an uprooted sakau plant, or yams are tied onto poles and shouldered by young men to the nahs. It is the responsibility of a designated “master of ceremonies” to mentally note who brought how much of what type of gift. As yams were out of season, they were replaced with breadfruit and by mid-day, there was a mound of it ten feet in diameter and over six feet high. The sakau plants that had arrived were piled in a massive heap. Some were cut down to the roots for pounding into drink while others were left whole for redistribution. A work colleague of mine counted forty pigs that were brought in, trussed upside down by their four legs to carrying poles and squealing noisily, then soundlessly slaughtered out of sight, and expertly butchered.

Like a turning tide, as soon as all the gifts had arrived, they began to be taken away under the direction of the “master of ceremonies.” After noting who brought what, it was his further responsibility to determine who would be given what portion. The criteria are complex and depend on a person’s rank, relation to the deceased, previous donations, and other factors too complex for an outsider to comprehend. Although I had contributed nothing, I received a five-pound cut of pork and those of us who had worked with Martin were awarded a large sakau plant.

With the removal of one person, the web of reciprocity has to be re-woven, a serious endeavor indeed. The distribution process is critical to the funeral as an event of social continuity. It is a concrete manifestation of how the death of one member
affects the constitution of the whole group. Just as in the West, the funeral rites
mourn the loss of a loved one and support the bereaved in a time of stress.
Additionally, however, the Pohnpeian funeral functions to rearrange the social order
in response to the loss. The man who oversees the redistribution of funeral gifts is
sending multiple messages. Pohnpeian society has an aversion to a social vacuum and
people must be elevated to the status of the deceased. The loss of any person causes a
ripple effect, and at the funeral each ripple must be accounted for. While the speeches
may celebrate the life of the individual who died, the redistribution rites reaffirm the
interdependence of life among the living.

A Pohnpeian teacher I enlisted to keep me apprised of what was going on
mentioned that the “master of ceremonies” had not attended high school. Recognizing
the phenomenal mental feat required and the importance of the task, I replied, “He
didn’t have time. He had too much to learn.”

Upon the completion of the distribution of offerings, a priest conducted a brief
Catholic ceremony and our dear friend Martin was laid to rest. Attending the funeral I
saw how well Pohnpeians know what is expected of them and how competently they
have learned to carry out their responsibilities. In contrast, their lack of assurance in
matters of formal, public education is disconcerting and unclear lines of authority
must be a contributing factor.

*Competing authority systems*

Separate spheres of education, however, can be maintained with parents and
community supporting both. For example, there are after-public-school Japanese
schools and Hebrew schools supported by parents who also belong to the public
school PTA. Historical exclusion and cultural differences can be overcome. However, it appeared to me that differences between Western and Pohnpeian forms of authority create tensions that keep parents and schools apart.

Pohnpeians maintain a highly structured political organization, one that is complicated by the overlay of Western democratic institutions and Christian missionary teachings onto a system of traditional chieftainship. Pre-Western contact Pohnpei was not a democracy, but a hierarchical chieftainship where chiefs assumed their position through birth rank. Christianity offered a mechanism for influence and social mobility that did not rely on birth, and in the course of 150 years, the chiefs and the churches have made their accommodations. Democracy was not an overt message of the missionaries, although nineteenth century American missionaries in Pohnpei tended to generalize Protestant notions of equality before God to equality among men on earth.

Although introduced in the nineteenth century, democratic governance wasn’t institutionalized until the American administration of Pohnpei after the Second World War. For over fifty years now Pohnpeians have been in a situation of balancing and integrating multiple systems of authority. From personal observations, it seems to me that contemporary Pohnpeian politicians are grappling with how to shift the systems away from “separate but equal” status to something more holistic as, similarly, educators are struggling to define and make a place for both Pohnpeian and Western notions of education.

The synthesis is not easy. Pohnpei has long been divided into five chiefly districts; Madelonimwh, U, Kitti, Net, and Sokehs. In terms of authority, each district
is similarly arranged into two lineage sets of parallel chiefs. Nahnmwarki and Nanken are the highest titles, with the Nahnmwarki having paramount status, keeping aloof from the people and deriving ultimate authority because of divine lineage. A Samoan friend of mine likes to say, “You Westerners believe you were made in the likeness of God, but we islanders believe we are descended from Him.”

In each of Pohnpei’s districts, the Nanken serves as spokesperson for the Nahnmwarki. Through him, lesser chiefs and commoners have access to the Nahnmwarki. To advance to higher hereditary titles, lineage is the primary eligibility criteria for the Nahnmwarki and Nanken chains. When an opening occurs, the Nahnmwarki fills the position with the person next in line from the appropriate clan. With similar criteria and protocol, the Nanken determines who will succeed when the Nahnmwarki dies.

Until the late nineteenth century when the Germans took away the authority, the Nahnmwarki could impose a death sentence for infractions of protocol and had control of all land and its use. Significantly, the Nahnmwarki has retained the authority to grant titles and to delegate title granting. In addition to hereditary titles, the Nahnmwarki can bestow titles on the basis of service provided. Because those of lower chiefly rank function as the Nahnmwarki in his absence, granting titles for service occurs throughout the chain of chiefly responsibility. With multiple titles and routes to attain them, most Pohnpeians may receive or have a close relative receive a

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title of some importance.\textsuperscript{36} Competition among Pohnpeians includes vying for these "achieved" titles so the system retains considerable social meaning and cohesive power.

The chiefly system of social organization and operation seems diametrically opposed to notions of democracy. In Pohnpeian tradition the system operates from the top down through the Nahnmwarki's representatives to the people. A Pohnpeian friend of mine often says, "When the Nahnmwarki says jump, we don't ask how high, we just jump."

The democratic ideal, in contrast, operates from the bottom up with those placed in power acting as representatives of the people. Westerners, Americans in particular, tend to view any system other than democracy as unresponsive to the majority. The Pohnpeian system, however, is highly responsive to input from the community. The following diagrams illustrate the different routes to decision-making and community participation in democracy, autocracy, and what I term Pohnpeian authorized consensus.

\textsuperscript{36} Glen Petersen, "Chieftainship and the Origins of Power." (University of Hawaii Hamilton Library, photocopy, 1983).
In a democratic system, authority is delegated from the bottom up. Individuals vote for people in whom they invest the authority to make decisions. Thereby individual input to decision-making occurs through representation. The slogan, “One man, one vote” reflects the values of individualism and equality integral to American-style democracy. When decisions are handed down, they are the result of a majority vote based on deliberations that, in theory, have considered all input.

If a political system is not democratic, it is often assumed to be autocratic where power is concentrated at the top. Decisions are made unilaterally and handed down. Input to decision-making is opaque.
In the traditional Pohnpeian system, authority is vested in the high chief, the Nahnmwarki, by birthright.

As the Nahnmwarki's representatives recognize consensus, they invite stakeholders to discuss a topic with larger community groups.

All Pohnpeians have the right to give input to decisions, starting in small household groups.

Decisions issued by the Nahnmwarki reflect the consensus that has evolved through the increasingly inclusive process.

I experienced an example of Pohnpeian authorized consensus while trying to build community backing for a school-based literacy initiative. To begin, a Pohnpeian colleague and I requested a meeting with the principal of the school. In addition to his position at the school, the principal held several titles of respect and standing in the community. After hearing our proposal, he invited us to meet his faculty of eight teachers. The faculty meeting led to another invitation, this time to meet at the home of a hamlet headman. That evening my colleague spoke about the project to an assembled group of perhaps twenty adults. That presentation resonated enough that he received a further invitation, this time to a feast being held in honor of a high
titleholder in the Nahnmwarki line. Several hundred people attended the feast and my colleague once again was asked to speak about the school project. Several weeks later, he was invited to speak to the Nahnmwarki.

The example shows how Pohnpeians build consensus in a formal and cumulative manner. The process begins at the grassroots, by first convincing a small group that your idea merits an invitation to a larger group. As the next group endorses and gives input to your plan, the man with authority to do so will issue an invitation to appear before an even larger gathering. You work your way through the ranks, so that by the time the Nahnmwarki receives you, he is well aware of what you are proposing and knows the extent to which there is agreement with it. So when the Nahnmwarki says “jump” people don’t have to ask “how high” because they already know.

In Pohnpei, the five traditional districts are concurrently designated as municipalities. Elections are held for municipal officials as well as municipal representatives to a central legislature. Further, as a State within the Federated States of Micronesia, Pohnpeians elect Senators and Representatives to a national Congress. Pohnpeians are thus supporting government based on democratic principals at the local, state and national level while at the same time recognizing and supporting a traditional system of governance based on the sanctity of chiefly prerogatives. Churches are also hierarchically ordered institutions, and while not overtly political, tend to exercise considerable control over Pohnpeians’ behavior.

Schools fall under the purview of the democratic governance system. The Governor appoints the Director of Education and the Pohnpei Legislature allocates
monies for the operation of the school system. Since the centralization of the system during the 1960’s, communities have largely abrogated their interest in formal education to the schools. This view may be changing, however. Pohnpei’s current Five-Year Plan for education has placed parental involvement alongside of staff development, curriculum development, and vocational education as a priority for educational improvement.\(^\text{37}\) Recently completed language arts and social studies standards have incorporated elements of Pohnpeian culture into curriculum from grades one through twelve.\(^\text{38}\) The impression remains, however, that schools and communities are not working well together.

Chapter 3. Choosing an American research-based tool to examine Pohnpeian parental involvement

One approach to finding out why Pohnpeian parents are not more involved in the public schools is to ask about what is happening now in terms of parental involvement and determining how people feel about it. What seem to be the barriers, and particularly to what extent are the multiple layers of authority in contemporary Pohnpeian society a barrier? Once a view and attitudes toward the status quo have been established, relevant suggestions for improvement can be made.

To elicit Pohnpeians’ comments about parental involvement I have chosen to use a framework developed by Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. Epstein posits six categories of parental involvement, a categorization that emerged from the research on parental involvement done in the United States. I discuss her six categories later in this chapter, after I review the body of research from which the typology evolved.

American Research on Parental Involvement

In terms of education, literally hundreds of research studies have corroborated the age-old adage that the rich get richer. Research reviews by Eagle, Milne, and Sattes all point to socioeconomic status (SES), as the one factor that consistently correlates with student academic success and their family background.\(^39\) The higher a student’s SES, the more likely that student will do well in school. The unspoken

caveat of the slogan, "The more you learn, the more you earn," then, is that the more your parents have earned, the more likely it is that you will learn, and, in turn, earn for yourself.

While this is acceptable for those who view education as a mechanism to maintain the social status quo, it is distressing to those for whom education should provide opportunities for social mobility. It is distressing, too, to those who see an educated populace as an advantageous resource in post cold war international relations. Two very different perspectives on the purpose of education share a concern for finding predictors of academic success that go beyond SES. For American geopoliticians, any limitation on the number of successful students is potentially a weakness in the ability of the U.S. to compete in the international arena. This perspective lay behind "A Nation At Risk," a government call to improve the state of education as a means of defending U.S. primacy in global economic affairs.40 The call for larger numbers of successful students implied greater inclusiveness of parents in the education of their children, and this appealed to those educators concerned with opportunity and equity. Thus a de facto partnership evolved between proponents of two very different views of education.

For both camps, it was clear that other factors would have to be encouraged to counterbalance the primacy of SES as a predictor of academic success. Encouraging parents to become more involved and take more responsibility for their children's education emerged as a measure that appealed to all stakeholders. From a governmental perspective, it is low cost. For those concerned with equity, it provides

opportunities for parental input into the educational process, and for social conservatives, parental involvement echoes the call for strong family values.

A research base on the correlation of parental involvement to student achievement had been growing throughout the 1980s. So much so that that by the mid 1990’s, the research into family involvement in education had become “a growth industry.”41 Perhaps the biggest boost to the research occurred in the late 1980s when studies began to claim that parental involvement was the single most important contributor to student achievement, aside from SES.

For example, Eva Eagle examined data from more than 11,000 high school students who had participated in a national survey conducted in 1980 and a follow-up survey completed in 1986 by the National Center for Educational Statistics.42 Eagle analyzed the relationship between students’ family characteristics, particularly SES, and educational achievement. She defined achievement as enrollment in post-secondary education and the attainment of a college degree. Characteristics monitored as signifiers of SES were mother’s education, father’s education, father’s occupation, family income, and markers of affluence such as automobiles and major appliances. Eagle found that the higher the family’s socioeconomic indicators, the more likely it was that students would move on to college. However, she also examined parent behaviors and found that providing a place to study, reading to children, and maintaining close contact with the school during their children’s high

school experience significantly impacted student achievement in both high and low SES families. Further, Eagle determined that children of parents who exhibited those behaviors were most likely to enroll in college, regardless of SES.

Once it became accepted that parental involvement is a strong contributor to student success, the “growth industry” noted by Henderson and Berla gained momentum. It was given a shot in the arm by the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which stated Goal # 8 as, “By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.” Research studies proliferated, identifying further benefits and characteristics of successful parental involvement projects.

In its review of the research, the National PTA found a range of benefits beyond improved student achievement to attribute to parental involvement. Student attendance and behavior improve when parents are involved. Parents exhibit better parenting skills. Teachers and parents develop better rapport and respect each other more. Teacher morale improves and the reputation of the school within the community is enhanced as well. These findings, however, were peripheral to the main focus of the studies. Most researchers were primarily concerned with the impact of parental involvement on student academic improvement. Others looked into home environments that support student success. Then there were those concerned

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with the barriers to parental involvement, and those who proposed means of overcoming the barriers.

Turning first to academic success, Henderson and Berla present a list of studies in which they found clear evidence of improved student achievement among high school students.

Across the programs studied, student achievement increased directly with the duration and intensity of parent involvement. Fifteen studies established increments or levels of involvement (as opposed to just comparing students in programs that included parent involvement with students in a control group, or with a pre-program baseline). Each one reported that the more parents are involved, the better students perform in school.45

Parental involvement also appears to have a strong impact at earlier levels of education as well. Irving Lazar and Richard Darlington conducted a longitudinal study of eleven early-childhood projects that featured high parental involvement. Comparing students from low-income housing whose parents were involved in school with a control group, they found that after 10 years students who had been in the projects were less likely to be placed in special education or retained in grade, and maintained higher IQ scores.46 Positive findings at the elementary and middle school


levels are reported by James Comer and Norris Haynes. They describe the School Development Program (SDP), a model for structuring schools with a responsive parental involvement component, and tracked student performance as compared with students from non-SDP schools. SDP students performed better in math and reading, had better attitudes toward school, reported a better sense of self-concept, and gave their classrooms more positive ratings.

A similarity between the preschool programs monitored by Lazar and Darlington and the School Development Program schools examined by Comer and Haynes is that the parental involvement components were highly structured. In other words, the programs clearly articulated parents’ roles in relation to their children’s school work and their interactions with the school. There are many children, however, whose parents are involved in their education without the benefit of a structured program. A number of researchers have looked into the characteristics of families that are supportive of their children’s success in school.

The method of their studies varies considerably. Some focus on successful students and look for similarities in their home environment. Others focus on the nature of the home environment, then look for evidence of a positive impact on student achievement. Still others concentrate on the SES of the children, then try to draw connections between their home environment and school performance. Bloom took the approach of interviewing highly successful young professionals whose families represented wide-ranging SES. He looked for patterns of family support

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48 B.S. Bloom, Developing Talent in Young People (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985)
that he felt could be generalized across all backgrounds. Benson, Buckley, and Medrich chose a set of parent-child interactions then gathered data from over seven hundred parents.\textsuperscript{49} They matched the frequency of the interactions with the SES of the parents, and then related the interactions with student performance. They hypothesized that parent-child activities would have different effects, depending on the SES of the families. They concluded that all interactions have a positive impact on student achievement, but the impact is greater on children from families of middle and upper SES. Catherine Snow and a group of literacy researchers at Harvard took another approach.\textsuperscript{50} They chose a sample of low-income elementary school students and followed them for two years. They collected data from school records, and from interviews with the students, parents and teachers, and classroom observations. They tracked student achievement in literacy and drew connections between varying types of home activities and student success.

Henderson and Berla reviewed a hodge-podge of studies, but nevertheless came up with a list of behaviors that seem to characterize families whose children are doing well in school.\textsuperscript{51} They claim that the types of activities are mentioned with enough frequency across the varying studies to merit inclusion in a list of supportive parent behaviors. In broad terms, parents of academically successful children set a structured family routine, monitor outside of school activities, model the value of

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learning and hard work, set high but realistic expectations and encourage children to meet them, promote literacy, and take advantage of community resources.

Once parental involvement was correlated satisfactorily to student achievement, it remained up to schools to take the next step and implement inclusive programs to involve parents. However, because schools typically have difficulty getting beyond traditional PTA activities and parent conferences, a number of researchers looked into the characteristics of effective parental involvement programs. It was quickly noted that involving parents on a regular and sustained basis requires tremendous outreach efforts. Communication is key and requires particular attention. The quality and quantity of communications were determined to be very important. Frequent positive communications that kept parents informed not only about the progress of their children but school events and activities were effective. Early on, the importance of involving parents in the governance of the school was recognized as a means of creating partnerships with parents. Having parents volunteer in the classroom and attend school events is a good start at involvement, but parents' participation as decision makers creates a relationship in which parents take responsibility for the educational process.

Additional support to parents through wider community involvement in schools was also seen as a useful strategy. Saundra Murray Nettles reviewed thirteen schools that engaged businesses and social service agencies in school-based

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52 J.F. Goodman, V. Sutton, and I. Harkavy, “The Effectiveness of Family Workshops in a Middle School Setting: Respect and Caring Make the Difference” Phi Delta Kappan 76 no. 9, 694 – 700.
activities. The programs had positive impact on student achievement and behavior. By increasing the convenience of various social service programs, the programs provided parents a reason to come to the school, and so were able to make contact with parents that often had stayed away.

**The contemporary American paradigm**

The research shows consistent correlation between parental involvement and improved student achievement. Numerous studies highlighted what parents should do to encourage their children in school. Others focused on what schools should do to engage parents. The next research phase of the "growth industry" pulled the research together to develop effective programs. Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University has become the dominant force in this particular area. Her categorization of six types of parental involvement has become the discourse paradigm. The National PTA has, in fact, accepted her typology, reworded it for a lay audience and issued it as the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

As proposed by Epstein, the six categories of parental involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The definitions of the categories are essentially behaviorist, that is, the categories are defined by sets of activities, or behaviors that can be observed and quantified as parents and schools join to improve involvement. Of the six, parenting, volunteering, and learning at home involve

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primarily parent-initiated activities. The elaboration of these categories suggests the
types of activities parents can do to become involved in their children’s education.
The other three types, communicating, decision-making, and collaborating with the
community are defined as ways for school personnel to engage parents.

“Parenting” concerns such basic home responsibilities as providing food,
sHELTER, and clothing for children. In addition, the category echoes the research on
family involvement that indicates that such things as setting a structured family
routine and monitoring outside of school activities are important parenting skills.
Volunteering is defined as assisting in classrooms and at school activities, but is
broadened to include attendance at events as part of an audience. Learning at home
suggests that parents take an active role in the academic tasks set for their children at
school. Helping with homework, guiding children in choices of subjects to take, and
discussions of schoolwork are supportive activities within this category of parental
involvement.

Activities that connect schools and the communities they serve define the
types of involvement for which the school must take initiative -- communicating,
decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Communicating involves
such things as sending report cards and notices of school activities and is expected to
be two-way. In other words, communication does not proceed only from school to
parent, but, as implied by the term itself, must have a feedback loop from parent to
school. Decision making as a form of parental involvement includes such activities
as PTA and School Community Based Management Councils. Partnership, not
confrontation or power struggles, is the anticipated outcome. Collaborating with the
community is a category that sees schools as institutions that can take advantage of community strengths and resources. Schools should connect with businesses, faith communities, health and recreation services.
Chapter 4. Applying the framework to Pohnpei

Cross-cultural considerations: How to begin?

To use Epstein's typology as a research tool, I had to take into account the cross-cultural nature of the study. As a Westerner, I was examining a Western-defined educational concept as it occurs in Pohnpei, a non-Western culture. I realized that the method of contact with Pohnpeian informants must be personal and direct. In other words, surveys or questionnaires are inappropriate. Formal methods of information gathering, particularly those that depend on written responses, are off-putting to Micronesians, and results from them are seldom satisfactory.58

In Pohnpei, surveys are not only too impersonal, but too difficult to administer as well. Pohnpei has no mail delivery for survey dissemination and collection, so the only way to administer a survey is individually. Even if language were not a problem, there are few phones to facilitate surveying. If I could recruit enough Pohnpeian speakers to administer a survey to a large enough sample, there would still be the further concern that participants would be more concerned with anticipating the survey-taker's desired response than expressing their opinion.

I needed a means of gathering information that would promote free expression among parents and administrators. I chose to convene small focus groups of parents and convene loosely structured individual interviews with principals. Participants in groups focused on Epstein's six categories of parental involvement but I encouraged them to interpret the categories as they saw them operating in Pohnpei's

schools. Through conversational interviews, loosely structured around Epstein’s categories, I expected to get a contrasting viewpoint from principals.

To gather data, video recording oral presentations from focus groups was acceptable, since speaking in a public forum is an attribute for Pohnpeians. An unanticipated benefit to the community occurred when the tapes were aired on the local cable channel. For my research the taped presentations were available as data for transcription and translation.

In contrast to videotaping public speech, audio recording individual interviews was unwelcome. When I asked them, my Pohnpeian colleagues expressed that audio recording during interviews could make the situation uncomfortable for the interviewees. My interpretation for the reticence to be recorded was the difference between public and private speech. Because the public reports of focus group conversations reflected consensus, they would not be regarded as individual speech. A one-on-one conversation, on the other hand, would be reflective of the individual and would entail candid and less-guarded speech. A tape would preclude deniability and could turn candor into embarrassment if made public. Data from individual interviews was therefore taken as notes during the interviews.

The mechanics of data collection are but one aspect to consider. In addition, permission to collect data must be obtained in culturally appropriate ways if it is to yield reliable results. Experience in Pohnpei and other Pacific islands led me to believe that sensitivity to two cultural elements is critical. One is protocol. How does an outsider appropriately establish contact? What are the cultural protocols that will
insure that a given research method will work as expected? The other is reciprocity. What does a person get in return for talking with you?

Pohnpeian society is very formal, and age-old hierarchy stipulates people’s reciprocal roles and responsibilities as the means for regulating personal interactions. Also, Pohnpeians have long recognized information as a commodity. The mantra that one sometimes sees in American classrooms “Knowledge is power” is nothing new to them. The clan that controls the information necessary to navigation, for example, is a powerful group indeed. So while Pohnpeians are very polite, they may not be amenable to a request for information, particularly when it comes with no reciprocal benefit. In such a case, it is easy for them to interpret the request as a demand.

Asking for information without promising an explicit benefit for giving it is one off-putting aspect to avoid while conducting cross-cultural research in the islands. Another is to ask for information without going through the proper channels. Pohnpeians have a sense of propriety, an etiquette, to observe in order to open communications with an outsider. Personal experience suggests that in Pohnpei the key lies in the notion of invitation.

Consider the term for Westerner, “menwai.” Literally, it means “the ones who came without being asked.” That alone should alert one to the importance Pohnpeians place on the protocol of invitation. Consider, too, the following anecdote told by the principal of Ohmine Elementary School when we were speaking informally about community involvement. The story goes like this. Pohnpei is known for high levels of rainfall, and its school system has little in the way of a maintenance budget. After a period of frequent rain, the grass on the Ohmine schoolyard was knee deep. An older
man, a neighbor of the school, approached the principal. "I found an old lawn mower and repaired it," he said. "I really don't know if it works well because I have no place to use it. Would you allow me to try it out on your school lawn?" The principal replied that the man would be very welcome to mow the schoolyard. What the story points out is that even in a case of obvious need one does not proceed unilaterally with assistance, and one couches an offer of assistance in a way that allows the recipient to invite it.

An essential component of the method for this study, then, was to engineer an invitation to conduct it. And that invitation depended on establishing that a reciprocal benefit would result. As noted in the introduction to this study, the Pohnpei school system had prioritized parental involvement as an area for improvement under its five-year plan for education. Helping to articulate the issues involved in parental involvement would hopefully be viewed as a mutual benefit to both the researcher and those concerned with the Pohnpeian educational system. Data collected for this study, therefore, began with a conversation to establish an agreement that the information gathered and shared would have reciprocal benefit.

The invitation to hold focus group discussions on parental involvement came from the head of the Pohnpei PTA President's Association. For the previous two years, the Association, in collaboration with the Pohnpei Department of Education and the Parental Information and Resource Center project, had held a forum for parents and educators at the start of the school year. The purpose had been to explore ways to promote parental involvement. This year I approached the Association like the man with the lawn mower. "I know of a way to look at parental involvement from
six different perspectives. I think it might be helpful for promoting parental involvement among Pohnpeian parents, so with your agreement I would like to try it out." As a result of that approach, I was invited to structure this year’s forum in a focus group format to discuss Epstein’s six categories of parental involvement.

**School Community Partnership Forum 2002, PICS High School, Pohnpei**

The School Community Partnership Forum 2002 was held on August 19, 2002, as an event to focus community conversations on the issue of parental involvement. As in the previous two years, the 2002 Forum was co-sponsored by the Pohnpei PTA President’s Association, the Parental Information and Resource Center Project, and the Pohnpei Department of Education. The co-sponsors agreed to organize the Forum around discussions of Dr. Joyce Epstein’s typology of parental involvement. The Department of Education sent invitations via the school principals and the President’s Association sent invitations via each school’s PTA president.

Over ninety parents and educators attended the Forum. At the outset of the day, participants completed sign-in sheets on which they gave their names, listed the school they represented, and checked whether they were attending as a teacher, administrator, parent, or PTA president/officer. With the help of an administrative staff person from the Pohnpei Department of Education, I reviewed the sign-in sheets later to identify the gender of the participants.

The following table shows the demographics of the Forum participants. The attendees were about half male, half female. Most of the administrators and all the PTA officials were male. Teachers were represented fairly equally by gender, but the majority of those attending as parents were women.
Table. Number of Forum participants by position and gender

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>Parent</th>
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* The additional number in the PTA column represents the traditional leader, Iso Nanken, who attended on behalf of the schools in the municipality of Kitti.

The participants were associated with twelve of the twenty eight schools on Pohnpei. Representatives attended from elementary schools in each of Pohnpei’s five municipalities as well as from Pohnpei’s single public high school. The following map shows the geographical distribution of the schools that were represented at the Forum. Schools are located on or near the circle island road, reflecting the concentration of population on the coastal shelf, away from the mountainous interior.
Focus group interaction: getting people to talk

To promote active and free conversation on the categories within focus groups, I had to take further cultural considerations into account. My experience with the group that developed the Pohnpei Five Year Plan for Education indicated that one key to open communication is the dispensation of traditional constraints on expressing opinions freely. Free speech is not a right or even a value among Pohnpeians. Any gathering is fraught with potential for social missteps. Pohnpeians are non-confrontational. Debate or argumentation is difficult because it may cause one party or the other to lose face. They would prefer to agree with what another person has said than to offer a contradiction. Also deterring active participation is the sense of not wanting to stand out or give the impression that you know more than any

one else. On the other hand, some people may resist contributing all that they know because the knowledge may be considered proprietary and not for general dissemination. In the case of the planning group, the Director of Education was the authority figure who released the participants from feeling guarded on expressing their opinions, and once that was done, participation was open and lively. Similarly at the Forum, the Director of Education’s spokesperson announced that central staff were there to participate and should not be considered as authorities or group leaders, and that everyone should express themselves openly.

With the help of the Forum coordinators, I asked the ninety five attendees to self-select into twelve groups that were heterogeneous as to school represented and role of the participants. A typical group was comprised of seven members including a principal or state level administrator, as well as teachers and parents from three different schools. The mix insured that the group thinking reflected consensus on the broad issues rather than school-specific profiles that might emerge from homogeneous school groupings. Also, mixing groups avoided polite deference to the principal. Pohnpeians will defer to the principal of their community’s school, but not necessarily to one from a school in a different municipality.

Patterns of deference to age and gender may have had some influence on the groups’ discussions; however, my observations noted widespread interactions among all participants. Women were speaking openly in mixed gender groups although spokespeople for the groups were male. Information concerning age was not a demographic that was collected, but to my untrained eye the group did not range greatly in age.
With one exception, there did not appear to be reluctance within the groups to speak freely. In one group there was evident deference to an older man. When I asked, I was told he was a high-ranking individual in the traditional system. Interestingly, he left the group to carry on a conversation with one of the DOE administrators. After he left, the others became much more verbal. When I asked about that, I was told that his self-removal from the group was intentional, a move that freed up the group who would otherwise be under constraint as to how they could speak in his presence. The action of the traditional leader and the call for open discussion by the DOE spokesperson indicated an acknowledgement and agreement to free and open speech as essential to the focus group format.

**Focus groups: gathering the data**

The data gathering process consisted of introducing the topic, dividing the whole group into smaller discussion units, then having the smaller groups report back to the group as a whole. The process is one that has become fairly standard in information gathering situations. Formalized versions occur in various professional development programs, for example, Facilitative Leadership. A similar process was used successfully as a means of gathering input during the developmental meetings for the Pohnpei Five Year Plan for Education. Replicating the format allowed the study to conduct twelve focus group discussions simultaneously, with two groups each talking about the same one of Epstein’s six categories of parental involvement.

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For each of Epstein’s six categories; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community, a set of guiding questions was developed in English and translated into Pohnpeian. The first two questions were, “What is happening now?” and “What else can be done?” The questions were meant to be definitional; that is, they asked for people’s interpretation of the category they were discussing.

A second set of questions was based on the assumption that parental involvement is minimal in Pohnpei’s schools. They were aimed at identifying barriers and determining the locus of authority to address the barriers. For each of the categories, the questions asked were “What are the barriers to parental involvement?” “Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?” and “How should it (barrier reduction) occur?”

Although specific in their wording, the questions were meant to guide conversation not direct it. Participants did not have to answer the questions as stated, or in order. They were given the flexibility to slide around and through the questions as they saw fit. The expectation was that the questions would prompt participants to focus on areas of greatest concern: current practice, improvements, barriers, or remediation.

Among the twelve focus groups, two were assigned the same topic, insuring that two separate groups examined each of Epstein’s six categories. Each group was asked to take notes and to turn them in at the end of the day. An initial time limit for conversation was set at forty-five minutes. The actual time spent talking within the groups was just over an hour. After the discussions, each group gave an oral
presentation of their group’s thinking. The presentations lasted about two hours. A videotape of the reports was made, although due to technical difficulties not all the reports were captured on tape. All conversations, notes, and reports were in Pohnpeian.

Focus groups: analyzing the data

Analysis of the written notes and videotaped presentations was done in two ways, first through translation and second through an examination of word frequency. A Pohnpeian acquaintance who teaches in the education department at the College of Micronesia, assigned a student to help me with the translation of the small group notes. The day after the Forum, the student and I sat down side by side and went over the notes. By going through the notes together, I was able to ask clarifying questions. For example, the groups discussing collaboration with the community wrote down a fairly extensive list of organizations. A translation would have given only the names, but by being involved with the translation process, I found that most of the groups were church affiliated. Interest groups similar to the Chamber of Commerce or voluntary benevolent associations like Rotary do not exist. That insight was a valuable addition to understanding the nature of community resources in Pohnpei.

The translation of the group reports entailed transcribing the videotape. A Pohnpeian colleague at Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) in Honolulu agreed to take the tape home and work with his older children on the transcription and translation. I paid for the services, but an additional reciprocal benefit was that the exercise provided the family with a focus on the Pohnpeian
language. My colleague expressed that the transcription task helped his efforts at promoting first language maintenance among his children.

The need for translation is obvious, but looking at word frequency may be less so. The utility of determining word frequency is emphasized primarily in reading pedagogy. The 100 most common words in English are introduced as sight recognition words to beginning readers. The more quickly those words are recognized, the more fluently the reader proceeds, yielding more time for short term memory to employ other strategies to comprehend text.

An examination of high frequency words in any language shows that most of them are temporal markers, prepositions, quantifiers and pronouns. It makes sense. Temporal markers like tense and adverbs of time serve to sequence language and, prepositions have multiple functions. For example, a dictionary definition of “of” lists over forty applications, assuring that “of” is a high frequency word in English. Quantifiers enumerate, for example two books, or indicate amount, as in some water, and pronouns avoid redundancy. They are highly functional words and so will be used often. In contrast, content words, for the most part nouns and verbs, differ on frequency lists, depending on the type of text examined. For example, a listing of high frequency content words from a history text will vary considerably from those taken from a science book. It can be expected, then, that frequently used content words taken from conversations about parental involvement will highlight vocabulary that is significant to that topic.

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Being a non-speaker of Pohnpeian, I felt I needed some further way to approach the comments people had made. Translation is never a one to one match between languages. Meanings overlap enough between languages to allow mutual understanding, but connotation and richness are often lost. As is often said, particularly when dealing with humor, “It loses something in translation.” My intention was to add depth to my understanding of the group notes and transcribed reports through a closer examination of the words most frequently used.

Qualitative research methods have used word count and word location to help identify themes in English text.62 Taking cues from reading research and qualitative methodology, I used computer software developed by Dr. Kyaw Soe at PREL to determine word frequency in both the group notes and the transcriptions of the group reports. The software converts text to a word list in database format, groups words that are the same, counts them, then sorts them by frequency. Once I had determined frequency, I asked an informant to identify content words as opposed to function words. Together we then looked deeper into their meanings, exploring the connotation of the words, their derivation, root components, and usage.

The technique is helpful for people like me who are doing research in a language they don’t know. Earlier, I stated first-hand knowledge of the gap between homes and schools in Pohnpei based on comments I heard at the 2002 Parent Community Partnership Forum. One might have inferred either that I understood Pohnpeian or that the proceedings were in English. In fact, neither is true. I don’t

understand Pohnpeian and the proceedings were in that language. However, the application of word frequency analysis would seem to validate my statement.

While the tension within the group was palpable, "feelings" are not given much credibility in research circles. Word frequency analysis provides a quantifiable back up. On the combined word frequency list of focus group notes and oral reports, the Pohnpeian negative marker "sohte" (no, not, lack) is the fifth most frequently used word. That alone would indicate a negative tone to the conversations. In addition, by checking the co-location of the negative marker "sohte", that is by finding the words it is used with, I found that it most commonly occurred with the nouns "understanding" (in Pohnpeian, "wehwe") and "help" (in Pohnpeian, "sawar")

In short, the conversations among parents at the Forum about schools and their involvement were punctuated by the phrases "lack of, or little understanding" and "not enough, little, or inadequate help." To say as I did previously that there is little help and understanding between home and school is, therefore, a reasonable claim.

The worth of examining word frequency is further evident from the examination of the word "peneinei." In the translation of the focus group guiding questions from English to Pohnpeian, the word is used whenever "parents" occurs. In the translation of the group notes from Pohnpeian to English, "parents" was the word selected whenever "peneinei" appeared. Not unexpectedly, it was the single most frequent content word on the frequency list so its predominance suggested closer interpretation.
As it turns out, “peneinei” indicates “family.” There is no word in Pohnpeian for parents, that is, the mother and father of a nuclear family group. I had suspected as much, and was prepared to think of “peneinei” in terms of an extended family. However, I found the Pohnpeian term to be much broader, well beyond what I expected a Pohnpeian extended family might be. The following figures represent the how different one’s frame of reference will be when speaking of parental involvement when one’s personal experience is nuclear family or an extended, Pohnpeian peneinei.

The following two figures contrast the organization of a Western nuclear family with the more complex form of a Pohnpeian peneinei. Both figures are simplifications but highlight the varying frame of reference one would have when discussing parental involvement in education depending on one’s family background.

Figure 5. A nuclear family

A nuclear family has a fairly straightforward, linear family tree. The child’s parents are the mother and father and they are the two adults with primary authority over the child.

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63 My Pohnpeian language informant, Rod Mauricio, tells me there is a newly emerging word in Pohnpeian to denote parents as we understand it in terms of a nuclear family. “Papa” the Pohnpeian vernacular for father, and “nana,” vernacular for mother, were combined into the phrase “papa y nana” father and mother – then further reduced into a composite form “papanana.” That the new word was not used at all during the Forum seems to indicate that the preferred frame of reference for parental involvement remains the extended as opposed to the nuclear family.
Figure 6. The Pohnpeian peneinei.

In Pohnpeian, there is no word for parent, meaning mother and father only. The family, peneinei, is a web of relations surrounding a child. In a Pohnpeian peneinei a child must respond to a minimum of ten adults and the lines of authority are determined by age rank, not parentage. The child enters the mother’s clan, and the adults in that clan have priority in terms of authority. Note, for example, that the male with greatest say over a child is not his or her biological father but the mother’s oldest brother.

“Peneinei” proceeds from the concept of clan; a marriage is the joining of two different clans. Children are born into their mother’s clan, and their primary authority figure is not their mother, but the “limesekedil,” the oldest woman of the clan. She may be in fact their mother, but could just as easily be their grandmother, aunt, great
aunt or other woman more remote in Western familial terms, but very close in 
Pohnpeian family relations. The oldest male in the clan that fathered the children’s 
mother is similarly respected and held close. Children are expected to understand the 
relationships among the two clan lines of their mother. Similarly, on the children’s 
father’s side another two clans are involved and there are similar senior men and 
women. The Pohnpeian “peneinei” is more a family web than a family tree and by 
looking at the word more closely it became clear that the Pohnpeian “parents” at the 
Forum had a completely different frame of reference than I did when they talked of 
parental involvement.
Chapter 5. What Pohnpeians have to say about parental involvement

This chapter presents the perspectives from the focus groups that met at the School Community Partnership Forum in January 2002. As mentioned earlier, twelve groups, averaging seven participants, were given question prompts to encourage them to discuss a research-based categorization of parental involvement. Careful examination of both the notes submitted by each group and their oral reports enabled me to identify major themes concerning parents’ attitudes toward parental involvement. Analyzing the data was a long process involving transcription, translation, writing and re-writing, and frequent consultation with language informants.

The translation process was the first review of the data. Immediately after the Forum, I sat down with Pohnpeian colleagues who had been present and we did an interactive translation. By “interactive” I mean that my informants did a literal translation of the notes while I asked clarifying questions, searched for the most appropriate English idiom to reflect the participants’ meaning, and checked with my informants for agreement.

The next step was for me to write up each group’s notes in English sentences, not trying to impose a narrative format, but simply following the order in which the notes were submitted. Then I read and re-read the pair of summaries from the two groups that discussed the same topic and re-wrote the individual summaries into a consolidated version, where I imposed a compare/contrast narrative format focusing on similarities and differences in the group conversations.

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I found that the differences between groups discussing the same topic were not contradictory. Rather, the comments tended to differ in the amount of response spent on the definitions of parental involvement as given in the question prompts. Some groups spoke more about the American definitions than others. The similarities tended to be in the expression of parents' attitudes toward the Pohnpeian educational system. After multiple readings of the combined group summaries, similarities could be identified among groups who spoke on the same topic as well as those who discussed other categorical definitions.

My second source of data was the oral reports presented by each group's spokesperson at the Forum. Video taping the reports resulted in an hour-long tape that had to be transcribed and translated. I paid the Mauricio "peneinei", the extended family of a Pohnpeian work colleague, to do the transcription and translation for me in Honolulu. More than just a fee for service, the task became a cultural maintenance project for the family since the language forms were specific to Pohnpeian public speech and therefore not frequently used or heard in Hawaii. From the literal translation I requested, I wrote summaries keeping the rhetorical flow of the speeches while highlighting the comments on parental involvement. Comparing the summaries of the reports with the summaries of the group notes I could confirm the themes that I had seen emerging from the group notes.

The remainder of this chapter presents the data from the Forum focus groups and reports. For each of the six categories of parental involvement I first offer the summaries of the notes that the groups turned in at the end of their discussion period. Next, I present the paraphrased oral reports that were given to the whole group.
Finally, for each of the notes and reports I highlight the dominant themes that emerged.

The categories are presented in the following order: parenting, learning at home, collaborating with the community, communicating, decision making, and volunteering. The chapter ends with a summary of the themes that developed. Also, in that summary section, I comment on the utility of using the Epstein typology of parental involvement with parents and educators in Pohnpei.

**Parenting: group notes**

The two groups that discussed parenting offered similar perspectives on the topic. One considered parenting primarily to be what parents should do at home to ready their children for school, an interpretation similar to that of American researchers into the topic. “Parents should be good, kind and gentle with their children. They should be sure their children have the supplies they need, have clean clothes, and are well fed. They should show appreciation when their children do well, and provide a play area near their home.”

Other comments, however, mention behaviors that, in the Epstein typology, might fall into the category “learning at home.” “Parents should check homework and be sure they know their children’s school schedule.” The group’s final statement goes even further by suggesting parents take on an advocacy role. “Parents should seek support from the Department of Education, federal programs, and other support groups to help their children.”

The second group echoes the concern for helping with homework but approaches it by suggesting that parents become aware of classroom objectives.
“Parents should know what their children will be learning each quarter so that they will be able to help with homework. They want to know what the teaching goals and objectives are.”

The group discussions on parenting, reflect Pohnpeians’ notion of how good parents behave toward their children, in the sense of childrearing. Their comments focus on developing a nurturing and loving environment. Comments specifically regarding school focus on homework and what parents need to know in order to help their children with it.

Less evident from the notes is the extent to which Pohnpeian parents consider the physical environment of their homes as supportive of their children’s success in school. For example, knowing that lighting is minimal in Pohnpeian homes, group participants may have noted a parenting responsibility to be sure their children had adequate light to read. No one did.

Changes in adult behaviors can also influence children’s success at school. Speaking of lighting, a Marshallese colleague of mine once mentioned that she would have to wait until adults were finished with their routines and socializing before she could have access to the home’s single kerosene lantern in order to do her homework. However, the Pohnpeian participants who discussed parenting did not explore school-supportive behavioral changes that adults might make.

Returning to the group notes, from the repeated requests for information about classroom activities, the groups are consistent in pointing out lack of understanding between school and home. The notes give the impression that parents do not feel welcome at schools. When they state that, “Parents should be able to visit schools to
observe how their children are doing,” there is an implication that they do not. Also indicative of the gap between home and school is that both groups note a need for better communication. What it is less evident from the notes is the extent to which parents understand how parenting behaviors can support children’s success in school.

**Parenting: the oral report**

Even in translation, the report on parenting reads like a well-constructed and thoughtful speech. That it was given extemporaneously highlights Pohnpeian’s oral traditions with its emphasis on speaking well and coherently with little preparation. The speaker begins with a joke, then traces parenting responsibilities and intergenerational dependency from prenatal care to death. My paraphrase of the speech, and of all the oral reports given for the six categorical aspects of parental involvement, attempts to follow the flow of the speaker’s rhetoric.

The speaker gains the audience’s attention by joking about the dialectical differences in Pohnpeian for the pronunciation of “neitik”, to give birth. He continues with a pun on the etymology of the word. Literally the two roots of the word combine as “my (nei) small (tik).” In certain contexts, however, “nei” can mean “clean.” The speaker plays on the word to make his point that “If people have a clean heart, then they can raise good children.”

Parents’ concern for a child begins at conception and continues through careful encouragement. To insure a live birth, no one should express “... bad feeling for the child that may cause the soul to leave while the body is still in the mother’s womb.” The speaker reminds the audience of the Pohnpeian custom of selecting a breadfruit or coconut tree and associating the newborn to it. The tree becomes an
analogy for the child’s life, “to symbolize that the child should grow up as strong as
the tree.” Just as a tree requires nurturing and care to become productive, so does a
child. The child must take responsibility for the tree’s growth, and imposing that duty
is the family’s first step in giving a child increasing responsibilities that will establish
a good reputation and promote integration into the community.

In terms of schooling, the speaker sees two types of families. “One type trusts
the school to provide pencils, books, and other supplies for the children and just tells
them ‘go to school.’ The other type also will provide the materials and supplies
important for the child to learn. They clothe the children, feed them, but also advise
them.” The first type displays carelessness about school preparation. The second type
takes a better approach. “Families need to feed the children with food and advice and
evaluate them as they are growing up.”

As a school principal, the speaker is happy when students come to school with
good habits in terms of taking care of materials and supplies. Returning to the notion
of cleanliness, with its connotations in Pohnpeian of purity, honesty, and sincerity, he
states, “When the child thinks of cleanliness, he is ready to be clean. His things, and
his thinking shall be clean.” Habits of cleanliness are best established at home.

The home should know what is going on at school, both in terms of activities
and their children’s academic performance. Parents should enforce homework and
“require the child to perform school work.” Also, parents should be willing to help
with school needs.

The last piece of advice from the speaker is that parents should be concerned
with their children’s behavior at school and should understand the need for play at
home. “When they leave home for school, they find free time for playing and doing
other things they couldn’t do at home.” If children are given too many chores and
home responsibilities, they will take advantage of school time as play time.

The speaker ends by reminding the audience of the Pohnpeian sense of
intergenerational continuity. You are always someone’s child. “Having children and
caring for them does not end when a child reaches eighteen. We know that caring for
children does not stop here. Even when a child becomes an old person, a senior
citizen, he is still your child until he closes his eyes to lay to rest, to death.”

**Emerging themes**

There is a melding of the categories “parenting” and “learning at home” as
evidenced by the notes turned in by both groups. In terms of parenting, the focus is on
traditional norms of acculturation with the expectation that a child well-grounded in
Pohnpeian values will do well in school. In terms of how to help children with school
work, there are repeated statements that parents don’t know enough about what is
happening in the classroom. Parents want information but don’t feel they are getting
enough. The group notes imply that communications between home and school are
inadequate.

**Learning at home: the group notes**

Describing the current status of learning at home, the group notes begin with a
strongly worded set of negative statements. “There is not enough communication
between families and schools.” “Families don’t have a clear understanding of what is
being taught in the classroom.” “Teachers don’t check homework and make
comments,” and “Words and actions are not the same.” When I asked for clarification
of that last comment, the context supplied was that parents feel the schools are not
doing what they say they are, specifically, they are not educating the children.

Similar to those who discussed parenting, the groups discussing learning at
home tended to focus on homework, “Homework should include a place for parents
to sign to show they have checked it. “ However, there were few other ideas on how
to assist children with their schoolwork. Homework has become customary, and
parents realize that it contributes to school success. What part they play, however, is
not clearly understood and parents want their role clarified. They understand that they
need to be better informed about instruction. “Teachers must let families know what
they are teaching.”

There were few ideas expressed on what parents can do at home to help their
children with schoolwork. Rather, the comments pointed out the gap between home
and school. Parents were not spared, since one comment describing the current
situation was “Parents do not have enough time nowadays to spend with their
children.” Nevertheless, when considering why the perceived gap between school and
home is so wide, the groups repeatedly indicated parents’ “lack of understanding of
their role” and “the lack of clear communication between families and teachers.”

To improve the situation, the groups suggested, “PTA meetings should take
time to develop common understandings between families and teachers in order to
promote good relationships.” Another suggestion for developing mutual
understanding was, ”Families need ‘parent’ training.” The task of improvement was
not assigned to one party, but rather was seen as a collective responsibility.
“Everyone should take responsibility for improving learning at home. The central education office, families, and teachers all have a role to play.”

From the discussions of both parenting and learning at home, a picture emerges of parents who are concerned about their children’s learning but largely unaware of what they can do to promote it. They feel they lack adequate information to enable them to become more involved and repeatedly ask the schools to provide it. The PTA is suggested as a forum for disseminating information and improving communications, but evidently there is no structured format for sharing information between home and school. From the parents’ perspective, until they know better what is going on in school, they have few ideas of how to help.

Learning at home: the oral report

The speaker begins by stating that the Forum participants know parents’ role in acculturation. In reference to the discussion guide question that asks “What are parents doing now as far as learning at home is concerned?,” he states, “All the groups understand the deep meaning, embedded in the question that regards the skills and talents needed for human beings to live in Pohnpei.” He does not elaborate on the “skills and talents.” His point is that the audience knows, as do Pohnpeian parents in general. He emphasizes that it is those cultural characteristics that lead to success in school. “If those things are strongly supported in our children, only then will it help them develop well in schools.”

Rather than deal with what, for him, is obvious, the speaker turns to the topic of what may be less clear for parents. “I would like to share those things that we cannot see or answer,” His caution is that non-Pohnpeian values are inherent to the
American style school system in place, and counsels that parents must examine the system carefully. "We need to be trained to be able to decide on important values, not to follow blindly, not knowing that we are walking down the wrong path."

Specifically, "The schools are showing and promoting and teaching the value of individualism instead of unity. This is what is given to us from current schooling."

The result, he continues, is that the current school system is "pulling the child between two parties, the school and the family." He suggests "Perhaps we could find the time to discuss the alternatives or choices we have," and addressing the audience directly, he proposes an active parental role. "You, as heads of families, are critical in the deciding."

The speaker begins to expand his topic, "And I want to ask a question of the Americans, for instance…" But he is not given a chance to complete the question. The Forum facilitator, a central staff administrator, interrupts him by saying, "I wish to help regarding culture. One of the most important values in our culture is respect for one another. If a child can show respect in all facets of life, then that child will definitely succeed." The intention of his remarks toward the group reporter is difficult for an outsider to gauge. It may be that he simply wants to move the group reports along, realizing that an open forum on the values underlying education is beyond the scope of the day’s activities. In any case, the facilitator effectively cuts off the speaker and invites the next group to give their report.

Emerging Themes

"Learning at home" and "parenting" are not clearly distinguished categories for the Forum participants. As did the groups discussing parenting, the groups
discussing learning at home spent as much time on the need to raise proper Pohnpeian children as they did on ways to help children with schoolwork. Most directly in line with the typical American definition of “learning at home,” all four groups express parents’ willingness to help children with their schoolwork, but indicate a great deal of uncertainty as to how to help them.

Also similar to the parenting focus groups, both those discussing learning at home cite inadequate communication between schools and the home. Unlike the groups discussing parenting, those discussing learning at home use words and tone that are confrontational. These groups, however, are the first to mention PTA meetings as a forum for training and improving communications. However, there are no suggestions as to structuring those conversations procedurally. In other words, the groups indicate where improved communications can begin, but not how or who should facilitate the discussion.

In terms of the content of communications, the reporter for the two groups implies that the primary need is to examine the fundamental value systems of home and school. He feels they are in opposition and would like to see parents take a more active role in articulating a synthesis of Pohnpeian and American education.

**Collaborating with the community: the group notes**

Separately, both groups considering “Collaborating with the community” developed a similar interpretation of the category. They focus on an ideal of community as a unity of school and home. They do not interpret collaborating with the community in the American sense of engaging multiple resources to support schools, although both groups explore that sense of the category initially. However,
their lists of community groups seem more in response to the discussion questions on paper than reflective of the groups' conversations. The resources they list are not connected to any role with the schools, nor are they identified as leaders in clarifying roles and responsibilities. Community resources are simply mentioned, albeit with the comment that none are much involved with the schools.

Both groups identify a similar list of community resources: churches, youth groups, traditional leaders, and the municipal office. In effect, what they identify as resources correspond to the three authority systems to which Pohnpeians must respond: the church, the elected government, and the traditional system.

In addition to their spiritual role, churches play a very active part in Pohnpeian social life. Established organizations mentioned include the Friday Women, the weekly Friday evening assembly of Protestant women. Another Protestant group is the Congregational Elders, comprised of both men and women. Mercedes is a Catholic women's group, and there is a group of graduates of Catholic schools called Ignacio. Youth groups are a sub-set of churches, since the churches organize the youth into groups for Bible study and other activities.

One of the groups mentions that in some cases, the municipal office engages with the schools by paying for teachers to conduct cultural classes like coconut fiber weaving. For the most part, however, the municipal office is not involved with the schools. The other group adds that there are associations based on employment. For example, there is an association for fishermen, another for farmers. Both groups include traditional leaders as critical to developing a sense of community ownership. However, among church, elected, traditional, and other identified community
resources, neither group would say which should take the lead or how “coming
together in unity and mutual understanding” can happen.

Similar to groups discussing other categories, the ones examining
collaborating with the community issued an appeal for unity and coming together. As
evidenced by their notes, each of the two groups discussing the topic extend the
notion of communication and collaboration to include developing a sense of
community ownership of the schools. They contend that a sense of ownership, not
only on the part of the parents, but also of the principal, chief municipal officer, and
the traditional leader of the area, will lead to better communication and collaboration.
To develop that sense of ownership, however, leads to the circular argument that
collaboration and communication need to be improved.

In terms of communication, one of the two groups states, “Parents need to
know their roles and responsibilities in relation to the schools. Communication needs
to occur on a daily basis with very clear expectations as to what the outcome of the
communication should be.” In terms of collaboration, the same group says, “All
community stakeholders must work together. Each group needs to listen carefully to
the others and operate from a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.”

The forum or procedures to establish those understandings remains unclear.
However, one group assigns a more active role for the PTA as advocates for the
schools. They feel the PTA should talk to law-makers and decision makers as a
means of improving the central government’s collaboration with the local
communities. The second group adds, “Improvement in collaboration requires
clarification of roles and responsibilities. People must share a realistic vision of how
the community can support education. Right now, people do not have a clear vision of what the community can do, and many are not accepting the responsibility that the schools would like them to.

**Collaborating with the community: the oral report**

The speaker giving the groups’ oral report shifts the category’s title from collaborating with the community to a more Pohnpeian sense of collaborating as a community. He does not repeat the information written in the groups’ notes. Rather, he chooses several points to elaborate, being careful to mention in closing that he is authorized to do so. “Those are the major points that I share with you, as the representative of the Iso Nanken’s group. The group agreed to share those points, and at the same time we request everyone’s help in addressing the issues.”

His first point moves away from collaboration with schools to the need for collaboration among community members to “train” children. The notion of education or schooling is not his immediate concern. The word he used, “kaiahn,” and translated as “training” comes from two roots, “ka” “to cause” and “ahn” “habit” and therefore implies child rearing; the way to acculturate the child to appropriate Pohnpeian behavior. “We must begin with training for students in the community. We would like to state to everyone that Iso Nanken’s group believes that training begins in the mother’s womb, continues with the regular conversations between parents and then extends outside the family.”

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64 Iso Nanken is a high title, held by a member of the group. He is the man who excused himself during the conversations to enable the participants to speak freely. The speaker would not speak on behalf of the Iso Nanken without his endorsement.
Recalling that the Pohnpeian term for “parents” refers to the extended family we can see how the speakers’ statement calls for ever-widening community involvement in the child’s acculturation. All adults have a role in children’s training, from care during prenatal development, to involvement in the extended family, and on through associations in the broader community. The speaker backs the validity of this view with the authority of the Iso Nanken, but goes on to note that it is not the case nowadays. Citing the multiple demands on a family’s time, the speaker notes “Families do not seem to be giving [children] enough supervision.”

That said, the speaker moves on to two parental activities that relate to their support for schooling. For one thing, parents should provide environmental print, examples of writing around the house. “It doesn’t matter if the parent knows how to write, some written forms should be displayed for the child. This will encourage the child to learn about writing in school.” Also, parents should also set a time schedule so that children attend to schoolwork. “Families need to prepare schedules so that, beginning at 7:00 p.m. or so children know they must do these things and/or study. Families need to enforce this so that learning can take place.”

In the Epstein typology, setting up a literacy-rich environment and setting schedules would be categorized as parenting or perhaps learning at home. For the speaker, and by extension the group he represents, the activities are collaborations between home and school. Understandably so, yet the interpretation departs from the usual American notion of “collaborating with the community” to mean bringing in multiple, outside resources to assist the school.
Similarly, the last point the speaker makes is another that reflects their
definition of collaboration with the community as interaction between home and
school. "What can families do to help children with homework" the speaker asks
rhetorically. "The obstacles preventing families from providing assistance is that
families do not have skills to help with homework, so families need training in that
area."

**Emerging Themes**

All six of the groups summarized up to this point have emphasized that
Pohnpeian parents understand their responsibility to raise proper Pohnpeian children.
Although they may be less than diligent given contemporary life, they know what to
do. Two of the individual reporters expand the idea, speaking quite eloquently of the
community responsibility for nurturing and developing children. The understanding
of the need to ground children in Pohnpeian values is a theme that is increasingly
strong.

Similarly, the theme that parents have limited expertise and confidence in
terms of supporting schooling is present among all the groups so far. The last two
groups feel they should promote literacy and structure time, but like the four groups
previously summarized, feel insecure about helping with homework.

The need to improve communications is another theme in all the discussions
and reports. The accusatory tone found in some other groups’ comments is not
common, but statements to the effect that homes and schools remain separate because
they don’t communicate well with each other occur in all the conversations to this
point.
The groups talking about collaboration are the first to call for clarification of roles and responsibilities. The certainty that people express regarding child rearing contrasts with their insecurity regarding schooling, and leads them to ask for definitions. They are seeking a way to integrate what they know about child rearing with what the schools know about formal, Western, education. A spirit of unity and coming together should characterize any such conversations. The stakeholders are specifically noted as traditional, elected, and church leaders. The PTA is emerging as the agreed-upon forum at which the discussions should occur.

**Communication: the group notes**

Representatives from eight different school communities participated in the two groups discussing home-school communication. Nevertheless they similarly list a limited set of ways that schools and families communicate. Communications from the school regarding school events or requests for assistance occur through PTA meetings and letters sent home with the children. Public announcements of upcoming events are made in church, on the radio, and at cultural gatherings. Some schools also send an annual written report to families that lists student accidents at school; a sort of safety update.

Communications regarding individual children occur primarily through letters. Schools tend to send written notes to families about inappropriate behavior, although phone contact may be made with those few homes with telephones. Report cards are considered a written form of communication to inform families of student achievement. Direct communication from families to the school is limited, occurring primarily in person or by telephone.

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Both groups agreed that communications are not satisfactory. They are school initiated and school centered and do not invite parents to join as partners in the education of their children. One group’s comments reflect the tension between home and school. “Parents do not feel connected to the educational system. Home and school are not working together. People don’t seem to care enough about educating the children.” The other group notes impatience on both sides and senses a lack of mutual respect. “Schools and families do not listen to each other, and in fact, may be ignoring each other.”

As members of a collective society, the Pohnpeian participants find the separation of home and school unsettling and emphasize a need for coming together “in unity and mutual understanding.” Both groups appeal to a sense of collective consensus building as a means of remedying the existing situation. The groups discussing communication see the PTA as the organization that should bring families and schools together but emphasize that all stakeholders, including PTA officers, parents, teachers, principals, local chiefs and elected officers must engage in the effort.

**Communication: the oral reports**

Two speakers reported on their group’s conversation concerning the parental involvement category “communication.” For the most part, the reports echo the notes submitted by the groups and agree with one another.

The first speaker emphasizes the importance of good communication. “Inadequacy in communication may cause people to become angry and boycott
meetings. When communication is good and adequate, work can proceed successfully.” There are, however, a number of barriers to good communication.

One of the several barriers is gender. Reporting on the group discussion, the speaker notes, “What we do not know is how females join in with males to expand communications.” Another is that radio announcements assume first of all that people have radios and secondly that they are listening to them when the announcements are made. As to the phone, “Communication by telephone reaches out to only the few people with telephones.” Written notes sent home with the children and asking church leaders to make announcements on Sundays are more effective, but still not adequate. “Unclear communication causes one to want to attend or not attend meetings.”

The difference of home and school spheres of learning is another cause for poor communications. “Because important family activities are not part of learning in schools, families often feel that they have done something wrong by keeping children out of school to attend them. So notice of those activities does not get to the schools.”

In addition to faulty mechanisms of communication and limited openness of communications, the manner of communicating can present a problem. I have noted earlier that Pohnpeians place great store in oral speech, but in schools’ communications with families, the speaker claims, “Some do not know what words or combinations of words will make someone feel comfortable enough to listen or read with trust. Some do not posses the quality to entertain with words, to show caring for others, to offer help, or how to listen with care and then to stand back and take a balance.”
Addressing who should take charge of improving communications, the speaker states, “If I am the PTA President, I would say it’s me. If I am a teacher, I would say it’s me. If I am anyone else, you name it, I would say it’s me.” The responsibility for improving communication is everyone’s and the purpose for doing so is to become united in approaches to education. “All of us together constitute the collective power to reduce obstacles. If there is adequate communication, everything else would work as desired.”

The second speaker picks up the theme of enhancing communications, and challenges the audience to come together for the benefit of all children. “Perhaps communication between families and schools hasn’t been maximized. Perhaps it has in some schools, but not in others. Inadequate communications is what we are trying to improve.” The rationale for improving communications is to get everyone in agreement on education. “If the effort toward better communications isn’t addressed, then our minds will never meet.” In conclusion, the speaker continues, “There should be mutual understanding, mutual trust from all parties, from the Department of Education, from the schools, from families, and from the community as a whole. If this unification holds the trust among all parties, then all children will succeed. We must unite, come together as one, work together in school related matters, and unify in a single tone of instruction that guides the child. I want to remind us of the announcement made by the President of America that says ‘No Child Left Behind.’ We shall teach all of our children. That is our responsibility.”
Emerging themes

The notes and reports indicate a desire for better communications between home and school, a theme common among all the focus groups. As these two groups discuss the issue, they raise problems that are local, between individual schools and the families they serve. Parents express resentment that communications are one-sided, from the school to the home. For the groups discussing the category, however, the issue is deeper than sharing information. It is a matter of establishing consensus and families do not feel as though they are being asked to contribute. The fact that parents feel guilty about taking their children out of school to attend traditional events points again to a sense that school and home priorities vary.

As members of a collective society, Pohnpeians want a collective response to education, one that respectfully takes into consideration all points of view. Like other groups, these two feel that it is everyone’s responsibility to contribute to a shared vision. Also like other groups, these participants do not feel that they are being given opportunities to take part. Again like other groups, they see the PTA as a potential forum for bringing people together, but how to structure conversations in order to bring about the desired unity of purpose is undecided.

Decision making: the group notes

Echoing other groups, those discussing decision making note the need for better communication and cooperation. “Improvements can be made through better collaboration. Families and schools need to work together. To make improvements, all stakeholders need to be involved.” In order to move toward
bringing communities and schools closer together, “Everyone’s roles and responsibilities must be clarified.”

Unlike any of the other groups, one of the two discussing decision making assigns the task to the Department of Education. “The DOE should take a leadership role.” While encouraging the DOE to act, the groups caution that it must recognize the importance of the community. “The Central Office needs to understand that a good community promotes good learners.”

As reflected by the notes, families are minimally involved in school governance. The groups each list areas in which families would like input. Families want to be consulted as to whether or not their children will be promoted to the next grade. This is particularly true in the case of talented youngsters who teachers feel may skip a grade. To some extent, families would like to decide at what age they send their children to school. One group expresses that parents, mothers in particular, are the best judges of the maturity and readiness of their children for school.

As far as what actually occurs now, family members feel they have a right to enter classrooms to observe their children, and insist on family approval for their children to participate in off-campus activities. These kinds of involvement in decisions about their children occur through communication with the principal. The groups suggest that additional involvement might occur by turning to family members as resource people. They could facilitate sports activities or serve as resources for Pohnpeian studies.

None of the issues concerns school governance per se. The groups discussing decision making focus on ways in which parents might advocate on behalf of their
children but they do not propose a governance role for families. Nevertheless, parents show a desire to have the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders clearly delineated. Decision making is one of the roles and while they may not claim it as their own role, they want input.

**Decision making: the oral reports**

Two individuals gave reports on their group’s conversations about decision making. The first speaker poses two basic questions. “One. How much do parents want to be involved? And two, how much will the State allow them to be involved?”

He addresses the second question first and describes the current situation as one where “decision making is handed down from the governor, the legislators, our education department, and then down to the schools for principals and teachers.” The role of families is limited to deciding the extent of their participation in Christmas and graduation activities and school cleaning events. “This is about all that families are given in the way of decision making to help the schools.” The speaker notes that schools “send letters to families only to request them to do work or help with school activities in the name of ‘decision making.’”

Returning to his question about the extent to which families would like to be involved, he asks, “What do families want now?” He mentions two specific points. One is family input to school staffing. “As parents we need to be aware of transferring teachers because we never know those things. It is often left for parents to learn those things after the fact. But we certainly need to be aware and be involved in such activities or decisions.” The second point he makes is not one of decision
making but information sharing. “We also need to understand the yearly academic advancement of our children in school.”

To involve parents more, the speaker proposes a “management style consistent with our collaborative culture. In this management type we reciprocate respect for one another.” He implies that decision making is opaque, but should not be. “Stop telling families that we are following decisions of the Governor, or the Board of Education, or Director of Education, or the specialists, or the principals. Tell them the reality of daily practice.” Through open communication, “we would stand together to avoid problems.”

To make a point about the separation of the educational system from families, the speaker continues with a bilingual play on the English word “far.” First he gives a letter and an associated English word, for example, F is for fame. Then he moves back into Pohnpeian for his interpretation of each word. “‘Fame’ comes when someone is in charge and claims all success in his name.” A is for authority. “For some people, authority speaks loudly, ‘I am the leader,’ ‘I will give permission,’ and ‘I am everything.’” R is for riches. “Being rich seems to imply thinking you are smarter and being rich also implies persistently cheating others.” He concludes, “If we put “fame,” “authority,” and “riches” all together, the acronym spells “far,” meaning far away. That person is far away from us. If we drop those three things then we can begin to value mutual respect, togetherness, and establish trust.”

The second speaker repeats the limited number of activities in which parents now have some say and calls for an improvement in the situation. The way to involve parents more actively is to develop “unity among families, community and schools.”
Each stakeholder should “understand their responsibilities and make sure that the responsibilities do not overlap.”

Emerging themes

The decisions parents currently make merely approve principal-initiated school activities. In terms of what decisions they would like to be more involved with, the limited number of issues the groups raise relates to policies set by the Department of Education. It is the Central Office that hires and transfers teachers, that sets criteria for passing from grade to grade, and sets the age for school attendance. The gap identified by these groups, then, is between the Central Office, schools, and families. The tone is markedly negative, with one speaker cleverly expressing why the Central administration is so far from families. As with most of the other groups, the implication is strong that the educational establishment behaves in an un-Pohnpeian like manner, and that all parties must sit down and come to consensus on roles and responsibilities.

Volunteering: the group notes

Volunteering is the one category that stands apart in terms of the manner in which it was discussed. Initially, the groups follow the suggested discussion questions, but unlike the groups discussing the other five types of parental involvement, the ones talking about volunteering felt a need to justify the activities they listed within the category. More specifically, they do not defend the activities themselves. For example, helping clean the school grounds has become an accepted activity, not a contentious one. Rather, it is the motivation behind the activities that
requires rationalization. The notion of volunteering seems to make Pohnpeians uncomfortable.

There is no word for volunteering in Pohnpeian. In the questions prepared for the focus groups the category was translated “sawas ni soh isepe”, literally, “assistance with no cost.” In their notes both groups rejected that translation and referred rather to “sawas ni sohte isais”, “assistance without compensation.” The participants recognize that any assistance has a cost, and they see that cost as compensation to the assistance provider.

In response to the first set of questions that ask what parents currently do for the school, the two groups that discussed volunteering came up with lists of activities relating specifically to facilities. The notes state, “Parents help clean the school grounds, build toilets, fix drinking fountains, and renovate classrooms.”

The “volunteer” activities that parents currently perform are collective in nature, that is, the activities entail working in groups rather than individually. Also, they list things that parents have been doing since the start of the American era. As was noted in the historical review of education in Pohnpei, the U.S. Navy administration of the islands after World War II supported schools which communities themselves built. Even with later centralization of budget and curriculum, responsibility for physical plant was left largely at the community level.

Both groups generated the same list of maintenance activities, indicating they have become accepted as a community role in support of the school. Newer voluntary support, however, may not be as clearly established. In the notes, mention of voluntary time and money contributions is stated somewhat tenuously. “Parents
should give money for scholarship funds, to support field trips, and to buy encyclopedia. Attending PTA meetings is a voluntary contribution of time, as is going into classrooms to assist teachers.”

There is an implication that these more individual types of voluntary activities are neither accepted as readily as the collective forms nor carried out as frequently. An abrupt shift in the tone of the notes supports that interpretation. “Improving volunteering in the schools must reflect a Christian love for children. Volunteering should proceed from a sense of heartfelt cooperation without expectation of compensation. If families do not contribute to the school, it indicates a lack of concern and love for their children.”

**Volunteering: the oral report**

Of the six categories of parental involvement, only volunteering evoked an appeal to Christian, as opposed to traditional Pohnpeian values. The speaker who reported for both groups followed the group notes by first listing what parents do voluntarily then ending with an appeal to a Christian sense of unity. Unity is a theme of several of the group discussions and reports, but for other categories, the appeal was to traditional practices of collective action. Volunteering, however, needs the support of an established but non-Pohnpeian authority system, namely, Christianity.

The speaker starts by joking that he is reporting “with no compensation” and acknowledges that, “We all understand about helping others with no compensation.” He goes on to list ten specific volunteer activities that parents now perform. “According to the two groups’ investigation, they listed all those things that they could recall doing with no compensation. They include: 1. cleaning the campus, 2.
making outhouses for schools, 3. making drinking water catchment tanks for schools, 4. repairing classrooms, 5. participating or representing the school at meetings, 6. providing $1,000 scholarships for students that go on to high school, 7. providing tickets for trips to the islands off Pohnpei, including gifts for the children, 8. providing encyclopedia for the schools, 9. working with the schools for all 180 days of the school year, and the tenth and last, for the families of the PTA officers, taking responsibility for the care of the school.”

As an aside from the report, from the speakers' list we get a picture of schools with minimal facilities; no running water, rudimentary sanitation, and limited resource materials. The fact that parents contribute toward a scholarship fund tells us there are considerable costs connected to sending a child to the one central public high school. The parents' concern for the children on islands “off Pohnpei” reflects the centuries old association of those islands with Pohnpei proper. Finally, the reference to working with the schools for the entire school year and the responsibility assumed not just by the PTA officers but their families as well indicates a sense of community ownership. That feeling, however, may be more in theory than practice. Of the ten types of volunteering, the speaker does not distinguish between those that commonly occur and those that he feels parents should practice.

Returning to the report, the speaker comments on the voluntary nature of the listed activities. “Because those kinds of help are from the heart, with no expectation of compensation, they just happen positively. Each one spontaneously comes up, showing that people value the undertakings. It shows collaboration and we need to reinforce and encourage them with good hearts.”
The barrier to voluntary participation is "unloving." It is not a question of structural impediments that limit opportunities. The fault lies within each person's commitment. Therefore, the way to overcome the barrier is to promote unity of purpose. Unlike other commitments to action that are backed by traditional reciprocity and consensus, to act without compensation requires an appeal to a different authority system. "Let us unite in love as Christians."

**Emerging themes**

The discussions on volunteering were quite different from those on other topics, the only similarity to other groups being the call for unity. Still, it differs in terms of its unifying principal. All other pleas for unity are based on the collaborative nature of Pohnpeian society, but the justification for volunteering is based on shared Christian values.

None of the other focus groups make any reference to religious values. While several are critical of parents’ willingness to support schools, none are as stern and accusatory. Upon first reading the notes, my suspicion was that someone had taken to the bully pulpit to admonish the others on the Christian merit of supporting education. Therefore, with the group sign-in sheets in hand, I asked a Pohnpeian colleague whether any of the participants in the groups were pastors or otherwise recognized as church leaders. I was mistaken. No one among the groups was involved in any special way with a religious denomination. There appeared to be consensus among the groups for justifying volunteering through Christian values. I would need another explanation for the tone of the groups’ comments, so I looked more closely at the language used.
First, I considered the word “volunteering” as it is used in terms of parental involvement in American schools. Volunteering implies that parents will contribute time and effort, but that compensation is not due or expected. There is also a sense that parents will initiate action and come up with ideas to support the school. In Pohnpei, however, these connotations run contrary to notions of invitation and reciprocity. Since reciprocity is the glue that holds social interactions in line, doing something for nothing is highly suspect. In a reciprocal culture, a unilateral action demands a response whether people are prepared to provide one or not. Therefore initiative and volunteering can be disruptive. For example, to clean the school grounds without being asked or without expectation of compensation contradicts deeply held notions of proper social interaction. It breaches the protocol of invitation and upsets the balance that comes with reciprocity.

Earlier I related an anecdote of an old man manipulating an invitation to mow the schoolyard to illustrate the need to be invited before taking action in Pohnpeian society. The rest of the story is that immediately as the man began mowing the grass, the principal took up a collection among the faculty so that when he finished, the man was given some food and money. The school staff would not allow his deed to go without recognition and compensation.

For Pohnpeians to put aside the deeply felt need for reciprocity and to encourage initiative requires strong justification. Both groups turned to spiritual authority. With consistency, yet separately in the two groups, they rationalized volunteering by appealing to their interpretation of Christian love for children. In addition, both groups raised the Pohnpeian value of “minimin,” in English, “heartfelt
cooperation.” For the good of their children, parents should be willing to initiate assistance and contribute to the school without expecting something concrete in return. To motivate volunteering, the participants endorsed their Christian sense of what is good and right rather over the give and take of reciprocity

**Summary of focus group comments**

From their notes and oral reports, the participants of the Pohnpei School Community Partnership Forum presented consensus on the state of parental involvement in Pohnpei’s formal education system. The focus groups gave distinctly Pohnpeian interpretations to each of Epstein’s six categories: parenting, collaborating with the community, learning at home, communicating, decision making and volunteering. They described activities that, while unique, portray parental involvement as limited and static.

In terms of parenting, the prevailing notion is that the family’s role should center on traditional values to rear children as good Pohnpeians. Parents demonstrate love for the child from conception through pregnancy and extended families take the responsibility for nurturing and guiding the child to assume appropriate responsibilities from birth all the way to death. In relation to formal education, the assumption is that a child well brought up in Pohnpeian values will succeed at school.

The focus group participants interpret collaborating with the community as an extension of parenting. The community is an extension of the family and as such takes on the same responsibility as the family for the well-being and acculturation of children. The comments acknowledge that the school system addresses parents in terms of mother and father and rectify the narrowness of that view by stating that the
whole community maintains responsibility for the child. The collaboration of the community in the child's education is therefore similar to parenting and entails the same assumption that a proper Pohnpeian child can be successful in school.

As far as learning at home is concerned, the Forum participants think of it in terms of helping children with homework. As certain as parents are of their role in childrearing, however, they are conversely unsure of how to help their children with schoolwork. Parents are unaware of what their children are learning in school and receive no guidance on how they can help. Their interest in helping their children leads parents to complain about communications from the school. They want more information about what is going on in classrooms as well as some guidance on how they can help their children at home.

Home-school communications is a contentious topic for Pohnpeian parents. The means of communication are consistent from school to school. Messages are sent home with students, announcements made on the radio and at church on Sunday. Some communication is done by phone, but the number of families with phone service is small. The content of communications is limited. One to one communications generally deal with discipline issues. General announcements broadcast PTA meetings or special events requiring family assistance, like campus clean-up days. Lacking are communications to involve parents in the educative process, and parents express resentment at being left out.

Similar negative feelings mark families' interpretation of decision making. At best parents rubber-stamp decisions made by the central administration or the principal. They do not feel they have much of a role in governance, although the
extent to which they want a role is not well defined. The issue of governance cycles conversations back to the topic of communications, and the specified need for communications centers on clarifying roles and responsibilities of the home and the school system in the education of Pohnpeian children.

Volunteering is the one category of parental involvement that results in a conversational shift from Pohnpeian traditions to more recently introduced Christian values. The categorical aspects of parenting, collaborating with the community, learning at home, communicating, and decision-making, are all components that participants accept as valid. They don’t feel a need to rationalize activities within those other categories. The fact that the groups discussing volunteering do feel such a need to justify action may simply mean that the category is not a comfortable fit, and may not be a useful category through which to explore parental involvement in Pohnpei. For parents to provide support for schools, appealing to voluntary generosity is a less compelling motivation than establishing structured responsibilities.

The groups’ conversations give a snapshot of relevant current activities. However, ten of the twelve focus groups shifted away from defining the various categories to calling for clarification of roles and responsibilities. The near unanimous change in conversational direction indicates that defining the status quo was of secondary interest. Independently but consistently, the groups used the Forum to call for dialog with the school system. Participants found talking about six categories of parental involvement from the parents’ perspective to be asymmetrical. Although willing to describe parents’ activities, they uniformly noted the lack of corresponding or reciprocal school responsibilities.
While reviewing the focus groups’ notes with me, Dr. Rufino Mauricio, a Pohnpeian archeologist, noted that Pohnpeian notions of “roles and responsibilities” should be thought of more specifically as “rights and responsibilities” as it more accurately engenders and reiterates the importance of reciprocity to Pohnpeian culture. As I requested them to, participants used the six categories to list the activities they accept as their responsibility. However, by calling for clarification of roles, or rights, and responsibilities, they demand to know what they can expect from the school system in return.

By emphasizing roles and responsibilities, the Forum participants give clear direction on how to re-interpret their comments. More than a description of the current state of parental involvement, their comments express the underlying issues of authority as well as avenues for improvement. For me to understand those points, however I will have to shift from describing the Pohnpeian situation by listing activities under Epstein’s categories to re-interpreting the participants’ comments through themes that emerged from conversations across the categories.

**Themes that emerged from discussions among Pohnpeian parents on parental involvement**

The call to clarify roles and responsibilities regarding education recurs throughout the focus group discussions and reports. In Pohnpeian’s traditional hierarchy, everyone has a specific position with a defined role. Every role encompasses particular rights but every right entails a balancing responsibility. Your rights depend on who you are and taking the corresponding responsibility is not voluntary but expected behavior. Forum participants frequently stated their preference
to specify administrators', teachers', and parents' roles so that reciprocal rights and responsibilities could be made overt.

The participants recognized that clarifying roles would be an arduous process and made it clear that in any future conversations, they, as parents, would proceed from a definite perspective. Weaving through their comments were four recurrent themes that stated their basic assumptions and that I have represented as social values. The first theme is the value Pohnpeians place on transmitting their culture. The second is their value of formal education. The third is the value they place on being involved in the schooling of their children, and the fourth the value they hold for thoughtful and harmonious problem solving.

When parents claimed to understand how to raise proper Pohnpeian children, they were acknowledging their commitment to the their traditional communal lifestyle. The role of formal education in maintaining the traditional priority of the group over the individual is stated in the vision of education in the 1998 Pohnpei Five Year Plan for Education.

"To be successful citizens our students must develop a secure Pohnpeian identity. They must develop knowledge and skills in their own language and culture, literacy and communication, math, technology, sports and performing arts, survival and vocational careers. They must develop moral values and a knowledgeable respect and caring for the environment. Our students must demonstrate positive social behaviors, always using respectful and appropriate language, always being considerate and respectful. Through their knowledge, skills and behavior our students will show that they possess the positive
attitudes that lead to their being respected in the community, that reflect spiritual conviction, and that respect traditional values.” 65

Pohnpeian parents expect formal education to be an enhancement of a person’s contribution to the community. While the Department of Education’s vision statement reflects that view, parents are not sure that school practices uphold it. When one group reporter states, “The schools are showing and promoting and teaching the value of individualism instead of unity,” he shows an understanding that a culture’s institutions embody its values. The comment accuses the Pohnpei school system of fostering American individualism as it adopts the U.S. model of education and challenges the system to align its practice with its vision. In terms of a reciprocal understanding, parents are saying that they are confident they can pass Pohnpeian culture on to their children. In return, they want to hear from the Department of Education that schooling is consciously supporting their position.

The second theme that emerged was parents’ value of education, expressed through their concern for the academic achievement of their children. Parents defer to the schools to teach academic content, but imply that their children are not learning as much as they should. With such statements as, “They [the schools] are not doing what they say,” parents criticize the quality of public education. The basis for tension between parents and teachers was not articulated during the Forum conversations, but during interviews, principals from three elementary schools identified the primary issue as teacher absenteeism. Parents would like to see better instruction, but for the most part they are willing to leave academic content and delivery to teachers. They

express support through willingness to help with homework but ask for guidance in what to do. If teachers help parents understand how to help with homework, parents are ready and willing to do what they can.

The third theme was the value parents have for their involvement in the formal education of their children. Similar to their valuing academic achievement, Pohnpeian parents express their value of involvement by noting its absence. They do not feel they have been invited to participate. Their repeated call for clarifying rights and responsibilities shows they want to be involved in clearly defined ways. It also shows that they are willing to begin their involvement at a very fundamental level, by establishing appropriate and reciprocal social structures for their involvement.

Parents’ insistence on participation reflects the tradition of decision making as a flexible, consensus-building process in which everyone has a part. Regarding decisions about schooling, however, people are not yet sure where they stand in the process. Unlike traditional decision making with its established processes for input, there are neither clear means for parents to give input to decision making nor mechanisms for them to hold the school system accountable.

The fourth theme was parents’ value of reciprocal and harmonious discussions, conducted in the spirit of unity. It amounted to a procedural recommendation on the part of parents on the proper way to conduct conversations to solve their lack of involvement in the schools. This fourth theme, like the first, is rooted in Pohnpeian traditions. The first theme asserts the parents’ value of their culture as reflected in their childrearing practices. They are confident they can raise good Pohnpeian children. The fourth theme asserts the parents’ value of their culture
as reflected in the appropriate means of conversational interaction among adults. Everyone, they claim, knows how to approach controversial topics in an appropriate manner; that is, in a spirit of harmony and unity. The problem remains, however, of who has the authority to initiate and invite parents to come together.

The four themes resonated through the Forum proceedings, but in connection with each theme, parents raised a serious question. Pohnpeian parents value their culture and feel confident in their ability to transmit it to their children. But do the schools support them? Pohnpeian parents value formal education and are willing to encourage it at home. But are the schools up to the task? Pohnpeian parents value their involvement in the educational process. But are the schools willing to let them participate? Pohnpeian parents value harmonious and unified discussions on issues of common concern, particularly education. But who initiates and structures the conversations?
Chapter 6. Interviews

Because I intentionally structured the focus groups to give a broad overview of parental involvement in Pohnpei, I felt the need for more specific, contextualized examples. To get those examples, I asked Mrs. SeNellie Singeo, a colleague in the Parental Information and Resource Center project, to schedule interviews. She arranged for me to speak with the principals from three elementary schools that operate in different contexts. First I spoke with Mr. Sebastian Amor, the principal of a school that is undergoing a degree of suburbanization due to the first phase of paving a circle-island road. Later I spoke with the principal of a large urban elementary school, Mr. Danis Pol, and last with Mr. Tomas Artos, the principal of a rural school beyond the reach of the paved road.

Figure 6. Locations of the schools whose principals were interviewed.

The interview with Mr. Sebastian Amor, principal of Awak Elementary School, became the prototype of the interviews held with school principals. Questions
aimed at eliciting information regarding Epstein’s six categories of parental involvement were the basis of the interview. However, open-ended questions like “How do parents and the school communicate?” can be difficult to answer since they do not provide a specific starting point. I found it useful to break similar questions down to encourage response. “Do you send notes home with the students?” requires only a yes/no answer. From there follow up questions like “Who writes the notes?”, “Can all the parents read the notes?”, and “How do you know the parents get the notes?” eventually lead into an interesting discussion of the pros and cons of written communications between home and school.

It took time for Awak Principal Amor to feel at ease and know that his input was what mattered, not specific “answers” to my questions. Another useful interviewing technique was for me to restate what he had said. It served as clarification, showed my interest in what he was saying, led to further questions, and shifted our interaction from interviewer – interviewee to conversational partners. As one by one the nature of the categories became clear to the principal, and the tone of our interaction established that the topic was open for him to describe, a fascinating picture of parental involvement at Awak school emerged.

In addition to specific information concerning the ways parental involvement is practiced at the school, elements came up that were integrated into interviews with other principals. One was the role of women. At Awak, women were taking on an advocacy role, a mode of action without parallel in other aspects of Pohnpeian society. Second was the way the principal of Awak had developed a school-supportive relationship with the municipality’s highest chief. The means of
connecting to traditional leadership recurred as we spoke about each of the categories. Each of these two elements is significant because each is particularly Pohnpeian and not reflective of what has become accepted as best practice in the American research on parental involvement. Rather they offer insights as to how parental involvement is shaping itself in Pohnpei.

Finally, from the conversation with Principal Amor, it became evident that one recent event polarized school and community, highlighting the existing practices of parental involvement. The Pohnpei Director of Education had issued a unilateral directive that all students in Pohnpei's public schools would wear uniforms. The date for compliance was January 30, 2002. The policy caused an uproar, forcing all principals to use their best community relations skills.

The interviewing technique I used with Principal Amor and the range of topics that emerged set the pattern for interviews with the other principals. Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was structured loosely around Epstein's six categories of parental involvement. From my experience with Principal Amor, the later interviews included questions relating to specific roles of women and traditional leaders. Also, questions investigating how various principals handled the school uniform directive were added to further describe of the state of parental involvement at the three schools.

After the interviews, I wrote up a summary of the conversation and sent it to the principal for his review. All three principals were satisfied with the written summaries that I sent. After several readings of the summaries, I was able to compile a list of similarities and differences in the way the principals handled parental involvement.
involvement. The similarities indicated that all three principals were aware and responsive to the authority of the school central staff, the elected municipal officials, the traditional leadership, and the churches in the community. The differences among the principals’ efforts showed how they balanced the various authority systems.

**Parental involvement at Awak**

Sebastian Amor is the principal of Awak Elementary School in the municipality of U, just outside the urban center of Kolonia. Until recently, Awak was relatively isolated and rural, since the six miles to town was an arduous journey over rutted and unpaved roads. With the paving of a circle-island road, however, Awak has taken on a somewhat suburban tone, with people commuting to Kolonia for shopping and work.

The school is pleasantly located on a small peninsula that juts into a calm bay, with tropical breezes cooling the eight classrooms, one for each grade, first through eighth. Just over 260 students attend the school, and Principal Amor is generally regarded as a quiet, modest, yet effective principal. The following is a summary of the conversation he and I had on July 21, 2002.

Communications between parents and Awak Elementary School occur primarily in three ways: formally at PTA meetings, informally at social gatherings or random encounters, and through the children. Communications are basically oral and in-person, with few written communications or use of telephones or media. Radio notification of PTA meetings, for example, is not too effective because many families do not have radios. Similarly, lack of telephones limit the effectiveness of calling
parents. On the other hand, those parents who do have phones feel free to use them to call the school, usually to complain.

Written communications relate to legal issues where documentation may be required. For example a note is sent to parents when children have been absent too often and questions arise as to the family’s compliance with compulsory education laws. Also, for purposes of liability, the principal asks parents to sign permission slips for their children to participate in field trips or other off-campus events. For the most part, however, parents, teachers and administrators communicate face to face or through the students as intermediaries.

PTA meetings are held quarterly, or more frequently if the principal feels they are needed. The principal sets the agenda for the meetings but the officers; president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer, call the meetings. The principal sends announcements of the meeting home with students, and arranges for an announcement to be given at the church on Sunday. A typical meeting is arranged theater style, with the principal and officers at the front, facing the parents and teachers. The meeting begins with a prayer, then the secretary reads the previous meeting’s minutes. The principal goes over the agenda he has set, and as items come up that are of interest to particular parents, they are free to comment and express their opinion. It is common for parents to complain, particularly about teacher punctuality and absenteeism. They are not hesitant to accuse teachers and the principal of not doing their job. Most frequently, mothers attend the meetings and make the complaints.
In addition to the formal opportunity that the PTA provides to express concerns, an informal grievance procedure has developed in Awak. Women will approach the principal at any time in any location to take him to task for the irregular attendance by the teachers. At times, the age of the complainant in relation to the principal makes it uncomfortable for her to approach him. Younger people, in general, are hesitant to approach elders. In that case, she may send a representative of a more appropriate age. When the issue is a more serious concern, a serious discipline problem for example, a woman will bring along her husband or a male relative to confront the principal. Mothers residing in households with phones will call the principal when their children return home early from school because there is no teacher. Oftentimes, the principal will hear complaints of a teacher’s absenteeism even when the class is covered by a substitute. At Awak Elementary School, communications from parents to the school center primarily on the presence or absence of teachers in the classrooms.

In Principal Amor’s view, the fact that women take the advocacy position is notable and may reflect an increasingly public role for women in Pohnpei. Public officials are almost entirely men, but there are traditional and religious-based women’s groups that take positions on public issues. Women nowadays are better educated, have started businesses, drive, and work out of the home. Traditionally recognized as child-care providers, women are adding to that role by holding the school accountable, at least for maintaining a consistent class schedule.

Information about the school is sent home with the children through the daily oral school bulletin. At the beginning of each school day, the children assemble for a
flag ceremony and hear the principal deliver the daily bulletin. It is expected that they will relay the information contained in the bulletin to their parents.

At Awak, the students are also the vehicle for bringing information of general interest to the school. Each class has time set aside for "current events" during which students must tell something of public interest that they have heard outside of school. Since they have little exposure to media, children bring news to the "current events" that they have heard in their family and hamlet groups. Sometimes the younger children have to be cautioned not to relate family arguments, but once the parameters of "current events" are understood, the activity provides the school administrators and teachers a way to keep tabs on community happenings that may impact the school.

Opportunities for parent input to school governance occur in informal settings outside of the school and PTA structures. The Chief Magistrate and Awak Municipal Councilmembers are elected positions. When the principal wants to put a new local policy in place, he will ask the Council for its assistance. The Council will take the policy out to the community through a variety of venues to determine and develop support. If parent consensus shows they are strongly opposed, the policy will not be adopted. The mechanism for developing consensus is a process of small to larger group presentations.

In the case of educational policy directives from the State office, however, it is the principal's responsibility to build community support or overcome opposition. The uproar over school uniforms is an example. Early in 2001, the Director of Education issued a directive for all schools to adopt uniforms by January 2002. The
Awak Municipal Summit, an event held every four years to set community goals, endorsed the idea in spite of strong parental opposition. The principal was put to the test of implementing the policy. To do so required his careful manipulation of the school’s informal communications system. He used the morning flag ceremony and other student gatherings to convince students of the merit of uniforms, knowing that their views would have influence with their parents. He scheduled monthly PTA meetings, rather than the usual quarterly events, to maintain community attention on the issue. He also took advantage of informal gatherings and chance meetings to press his point. Importantly, he also gained the support of the highest chief, the Nahnmwarki. After three months of continuous lobbying within the community, he got the consensus he needed and asked the Nahnmwarki to set October 1, 2001 as the date by which all students would be expected to come to school in uniform.

The October date was three months earlier than the required date. By setting the earlier date, the principal aligned the community with a State directive but in effect co-opted the authority of the central office by implementing the policy early through consensus building and engaging the traditional leadership. He took the sting out of the order by having the local authorities endorse and implement it before the deadline.

Parental involvement at Ohmine

The second interview I conducted was with Damian Pol, principal of Ohmine Elementary School. Ohmine is a large, urban school with a diverse student population. Over 800 students attend the school in grades one through eight. The school is toward the western end of Kolonia town, the old Spanish colonial
headquarters. The area first urbanized around the Spanish garrison in the nineteenth century and continued to grow during Japanese and American administrations.

Unlike most of Pohnpei's schools, Ohmine is not located in a community consisting of networks of traditionally connected families. For Ohmine, "community" must be defined in the geographic sense of the area that surrounds the school. Families who live in the area come from all of Pohnpei’s five municipalities, drawn to the urban core in search of wage paying jobs.

The nature of the cash economy in Kolonia influences which children attend Ohmine Elementary. Jobs that pay well are predominantly with the government and are occupied by better-educated people. Children of government workers tend to go to private parochial schools. Employment outside of the government is limited. Because the private sector is not highly developed, the jobs available are low paying, so families dependant on cash income have a difficult time making ends meet. These are the families whose children attend Ohmine Elementary.

In addition, the school serves the Kapingamarangi population, a Polynesian group with age-old ties to Pohnpei who have established a distinct community near Ohmine School. As a low-status minority, the Kapingamarangi find it more difficult than others to find wage paying jobs. Also as outsiders living in Pohnpeian territory, they have limited access to farming and fishing. Other off-Pohnpeian groups that have settled in Kolonia come from Pingelap, Nukuoro, Sapwuafik and Mwoakilloa. While Pohnpeian in culture and language they add further diversity to the student population at Ohmine. In contemporary American terms the school is located in a low income
area with high unemployment and underemployment, and the student population at Ohmine Elementary is “at-risk,”

Principal Danio Pol doesn’t argue with that characterization but neither does he feel it leads to school failure. Mobilizing the resources available, and with an understanding of human nature and Pohnpeian culture, Principal Pol has led Ohmine families toward seeing the school as a community resource. The following is a summary of a conversation I had with him on January 14, 2003.

Not long ago, vandalism was a problem at Ohmine Elementary School. In the evenings, unemployed youth would jump over the chain link fence to use the basketball court and party behind the school buildings, out of sight of police patrols. Windows were broken, graffiti was scrawled on walls and the campus was littered with food containers, beer cans and broken bottles. Principal Pol’s response was to unlock the gates. He met with youth groups and invited them to use the campus, consider it their own, but to take the responsibility for making it their own. In time the strategy worked and the vandalism and late night partying stopped.

Clever and patient leadership marks the principal’s effort to reach out to the entire school community. He endeavored to engage both parents and other residents in the development of a recent School Improvement Plan. In the course of developing the Plan, parents were vocal in demanding more qualified teachers. They wanted a strong staff development component in the Plan. Other community members wanted a statement in the Plan that the school would be a community center, making its computer lab available as well as its athletic equipment and facilities. By encouraging
broad input, the principal was able to guide the community to articulate the hopes that he himself has for the school.

According to Principal Pol, parents of children at Ohmine are more vocal but less involved than parents at other schools. Because of the demands on their time from their jobs, parents prioritize survival wage earning over involvement with the school. Knowing firsthand the impact of education on employment, Ohmine parents see education as a means of economic advancement. They expect a strong academic program from the school and voice their opinion. For example, several parochial schools, whose students have for years out-scored public school students on the high school entrance exam, are located close by in Kolonia. Parents are not reticent to compare the public schools unfavorably with them.

Principal Pol has several initiatives in place to turn parents from complaining to partnering. The school is an “intensive site” for the U.S. Department of Education (USED) Star Schools program. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning holds the program grant for the Pacific region and has helped the school develop a computer lab and teleconferencing capacity. Making use of the technology infrastructure, and aided by a 21st Century Learning Center grant, also through USED, the principal has brought parents in for after-school intergenerational computer classes as well as “bookmaking.”

Bookmaking at Ohmine is all about reading, literally making books in Pohnpeian for students to read. Parents recognize the need, as there are few written materials in the language. In response to the community demand for literacy in Pohnpeian, the school has devised a way to involve parents and students to generate
materials. Through Ohmnine’s bookmaking project, students go home and interview elders to collect stories. During the after-school computer program, students and adult mentors input the stories, edit, and illustrate them with computer graphics.

Other special events that draw parents to the school are the Celebration of Learning Day, Clean-up Days, and Summer Camp. At the Celebration of Learning Day, resources from around the island are invited to set up informational booths and give demonstrations. The Fire and Police Departments are always represented, as is the U.S. Army Civic Action Team, the Public Health Department, and many other community resources. Each participating agency tries to emphasize how education leads to careers in their respective field. The atmosphere of the day is kept light, with entertainment and food available.

Clean-up Days are more serious, with parents and teachers working together to clean up the school grounds and make minor repairs to buildings. Summer Camp is a new endeavor through which the school encourages parents to participate as coaches for sports teams during the summer months.

As a communications tool, teachers use the school computers to publish a newsletter, complete with color digital photographs. Editorial comment is not lacking. The February 7, 2003, edition of the Ohmine Y2 Newsletter offers “Special Points of Interest: All students become the victims of our carelessness, negligence, and of our greed for power and wealth!” Other means of communication with parents include the telephone, notes, and parent teacher conferences.

Unlike families in rural areas, most in Kolonia have a phone allowing the school to telephone for emergency purposes. Similar to other schools, teachers at
Ohmine do not often send notes home with students. There is a question of the families’ ability to read the notes, as well as the age-old problem of the student losing the note en route. Formerly, parent teacher conferences were scheduled to coincide with the PTA meeting where report cards were distributed. Parent participation was low, so the school has recently restructured its PTA and parent teacher conferences.

PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences are now scheduled separately. Each teacher is tasked with determining the best time and means of arranging conferences with parents. As in the past, PTA meetings are scheduled by the principal and announced at the local churches, but more parent input to the agenda is encouraged. In an effort to be flexible in the face of the time constraints on busy families the PTA as a whole is doing more work through committees than before. Nevertheless, the principal remains the primary force behind the organization and he feels that doing so follows a traditional expectation for leadership.

In terms of relating to traditional leaders, however, the principal is in a situation quite different from his counterparts at rural schools. He does not have recourse to the leadership to support his initiatives because the authority systems are inoperative across municipal lines. No single Namwarkhi can back the Ohmine principal’s decision on uniforms, for example. Nevertheless, families in the urban area have formed municipal groups; those from U congregate, as do those from Kitti, and so on. They are well aware of traditional leadership lines and know who holds what title among the families in town. The principal, therefore, must also be aware of the titleholders and pay them the respect they are due. However, he cannot mobilize
their support in the way that principal at Awak Elementary School has partnered with the traditional leadership in U.

Unlike Principal Amor at Awak who was able to enlist the aid of the high chief to meet the central office requirement that all schools adopt uniforms, Principal Pol had to use other tactics to implement the directive. Consensus among parents of the utility of uniforms was assembled group by group. Whereas in traditional communities, consensus emerges in concentric waves outwardly from small to larger groups, at Ohmine consensus develops by piecing together separate groups. On the issue of uniforms, the PTA served as the decision making body and the mechanism was a majority vote. After a considerable amount of personal interaction by the principal and staff in the community, the PTA approved a school rule requiring student uniforms by a vote of 66 to 4.

The PTA delegated the responsibility of implementing the rule to the principal, but also required him to find a vendor and to lobby the Pohnpei State Legislature for money to pay for the uniforms. In return for their agreement, parents expected the principal to advocate on their behalf, a reciprocal arrangement that did not occur in other school communities. Like parents in Ohmine, those in Awak and Seinwar, two rural and more traditional communities, were hesitant to agree to uniforms. Consensus in those communities, however, resulted in the parents assuming the responsibility to provide uniforms.

The roles and responsibilities of parents and school are an issue at Ohmine. Principal Pol, however, sees the issue as one of rights and responsibilities. Essentially, it is a question of power; people want to be clear on who has the authority
to do what. In the Pohnpeian hierarchical way of thinking, authority presumes the right to assign responsibility. However, both the school and the parents have rights, therefore both may expect the other to take on responsibilities. The situation today is one in which parents are not sure of their rights in terms of the formal education of their children and are therefore unsure of what they can expect from the schools. On the other hand, the schools are unsure of their rights as educators, and aren’t clear on what they can expect from parents. The resulting instability affects the children negatively by removing the clarity of adult roles in their educational development. In the words of Principal Pol, “Everyone is afraid of someone, so the children are afraid of no one.”

He adds, however, that conversational indirection is a factor to consider when people talk of rights or roles. For example, when the participants in a conversation include parents, teachers, and central administrative staff, a comment requesting clarification of roles and responsibilities might be aimed at the school, the central staff, or both. Just as likely, however, the intention may be less a request for clarification than an accusation that, for example, the central staff is not meeting its responsibilities. Context of time and place, speaker and listener all contribute to meaning. In the urban context of Ohmine Elementary School, the principal sees the PTA as the forum in which the convolutions of Pohnpeian discourse on education must take place.

**Parental involvement at Seinwar**

Seinwar Elementary School is a rural school in Kitti municipality, far from the central education offices in Kolonia. It is still relatively isolated because the circle
island road paving project has not yet reached that far. The school serves a dispersed population with limited transportation, but over 300 students attend regularly in grades one through eight. In spite of its remote location Seinwar consistently has the highest percentage of its eighth grade class passing the high school entrance test of any school in Pohnpei.

Family and community involvement are critical to the school’s success, according to Principal Thomas Artos. When arranging our interview, my local contact told Principal Artos that I knew the reputation of the school and wanted to learn how the school and community were working together. He seemed pleased to make the long trip into town to talk with me so I was careful to congratulate him and the school for their considerable success. The following is a summary of the conversation we had on January 15, 2003.

There are historical and cultural factors that have contributed to making Seinwar a strong school. Principal Artos notes that, up until 1974, Seinwar Elementary was a Catholic parochial school -- a missionary school established in Kitti in the 1880’s at the request of the high chief, the Nahnmwarki. His request to the Capuchin friars countered the growing influence of American Protestant missionaries who had gained the support of a parallel chieftainship line. Thus, Western style education in Kitti can be traced to chiefly rivalries from the late nineteenth century.

Another unique aspect of Seinwar is that the teachers at the school belong to the same matrilineal line. What might be interpreted as nepotism from a Western

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perspective has positive connotations from a Pohnpeian point of view. Traditionally, clans hold proprietary knowledge, for example in canoe building. They are recognized as experts and are expected to use their skills for the well-being of the community. The community’s transfer of this cultural trait to education places a degree of accountability on the teachers at Seinwar that is lacking at other schools.

On the part of the faculty, the community’s trust engenders a sense of responsibility and allows for continuity. Teachers are role models. In the words of Principal Artos, “A teacher is a teacher all day and night.” Indicative of the trust between community and the school, teachers at Seinwar visit homes on a monthly basis and are welcomed. They receive no extra compensation, but have accepted home visits as part of their responsibility.

Continuity and consistency mark faculty hiring and the development of public support as well. Since Seinwar became a public school, there have been only two principals. The first principal, who retired only a year ago, had a plan for the school around which he was able to mobilize the community. He emphasized the importance of education, and even those parents with less schooling feel that contemporary life requires more education for their children than they had.

The long history of schooling in Kitti, plus the overt control by a lineage group, has resulted in a high level of community involvement. The three authority systems of tradition, church, and elected government all support the school. Traditional leaders are represented on the PTA and advocate for bilingual education to insure that Pohnpeian language and culture have a place in the school. The Iso Nanken, a high-ranking Kittit chief, attended the School Community Forum. He was
the only traditional leader to do so, demonstrating the commitment of the traditional system in Kitti to public education.

Church leaders are also on the PTA executive board. Participation from the religious community includes a deacon from the Protestant church and a member of the Catholic parish council. Unlike the urban center, Kolonia, where there are several parochial schools, public Kitti Elementary is the only school available. Church interests exert their influence by giving their support to the public school.

The elected leadership actively supports the school as well. One of the municipal councilmen, who received a bachelor’s degree from an American university, participates regularly at PTA meetings. He is an advocate for education in the community, and takes time to explain policies and procedures to parents. With his support, the Kitti municipal council has earmarked part of its legislatively funded allocation for municipal operations for education. The council pays for three teachers at the school, supplementary to the staffing paid for by the Pohnpei Department of Education.

As with other schools in Pohnpei, the PTA is the primary school-community communication forum. Unlike other PTAs, however, parents are invited into classrooms prior to PTA meetings to look for items to place on the agenda. The PTA takes an active role in policy and management decision making. For example, the PTA set attendance policies for both students and teachers. In an unprecedented move, the PTA backed the school when it brought a family to court because the children did not meet the attendance requirement.
As for the faculty, teachers are expected to be in school unless sick. One of the primary reasons for teacher absenteeism is funerals. A funeral in Pohnpei is a four-day affair steeped in tradition and a primary mechanism for conveying custom from generation to generation. Nevertheless, the Seinwar PTA, with the support of traditional leaders, determined that teachers could take time off only to attend funerals of very close relatives. Principal Artos notes, "When a teacher is absent from a funeral in other places, people talk about him saying, 'Why isn't he here?'' But when a teacher attends a funeral here, people talk about him saying, 'Why isn't he at school?'"

Parents' trust in the school is reflected in their advocacy. The PTA makes recommendations on hiring, giving preference to applicants from the community, in effect validating the control of the school by the lineage group that has been running it for years. The PTA has objected when teachers were transferred, exercising their right to have a say in staffing. When the central office wanted to extend the school day and include additional subjects, the PTA objected, showing their concern for the length of time children spend at school and exercising their right to have a say in curriculum. At a later time, when the central office made budget cuts and reduced staff time from 80 to 72 hours bi-weekly, the PTA objected, exercising their right to give input on budgeting.

The Seinwar school community acts with the unity of purpose that focus groups at the Community School Partnership Forum called for. Examples relating to school uniforms and homework are illustrative. When the issue of school uniforms came up, the principal had little difficulty engaging the community in conversations
on the topic. Educational issues have become part of the community discourse. The
topic was brought up to the community at large and later, at a PTA meeting, uniforms
were unanimously approved through one vote. When the principal mentioned that
homework was not being turned in to teachers’ satisfaction, parents’ discussed the
issue. They decided they must structure their children’s time to insure that homework
is finished. Recently, teachers have noticed a marked increase in homework
completion. The community feels a sense of ownership and partnership with Seinwar
Elementary School that other schools are still struggling to develop.

*Examples of effective parental involvement in Pohnpei*

The intention behind my interviewing three elementary school principals was
to gain another perspective on parental involvement by exploring school specific
activities. To my pleasure, the principals enjoyed talking about their schools and
provided insight on the parental involvement strategies that worked in their
communities. In effect, each principal has created a model that may be informative
for other schools in Pohnpei. In my opinion, each principal has crafted a distinctive
and exemplary approach.

At Awak Elementary School, Principal Amor has modified the traditional
manner of grass roots communication and consensus building to rally support for the
school. In the traditional pattern, titled representatives of the high chief act as his eyes
and ears to relay input to his decisions. Adapting the process, Principal Amor has
recruited the elected community council members to initiate and regulate the process
of consensus building in matters relating to the school. The principal is careful not to
bypass the traditional leadership. On the contrary, he has successfully enlisted the
support of the Nahnmwarki, the high chief, to validate decisions on school operations. Fortunately, the principal has the recognized standing within the traditional system to be able to approach the Nahnmwarki.

Principal Amor's approach to gathering input is an example of a developing synthesis of the elected system with the traditional system. Elected community council members gather input from the community on behalf of the principal. As principal, he uses that input to inform his decisions. Nevertheless, on the basis of his standing within the title-holding system, he secures the high chief's validation of his decisions.

Another useful strategy that Principal Amor has developed is to encourage intergenerational conversations to establish a home-school communications loop. When students go home, he expects them to repeat the daily school bulletin that he delivers orally. Students are also expected to bring "current events" from home back to the school. Through these activities, students become an integral part of the communication pattern between home and school.

As with his strategy to gain input and validation of his decisions, Principal Amor's incorporation of students into home-school communications is an example of combining the old and the new. In traditional Pohnpeian education, children are silent learners. Parents observe carefully and gradually increase their children's responsibilities according to their demonstrated skills. Principal Amor has altered this pattern by encouraging children to talk about school at home. However, he has kept the tradition of increasing responsibility. As children get older, the expectation is that they will become better links between home and school.
The situation is quite different at rural Seinwar, where Principal Thomas Artos finds himself in the enviable position of having a hundred year history of community involvement in the elementary school. Started as a parochial school, Seinwar Elementary became a public school about twenty-five years ago. When the school was taken over by the government, traditions of parental involvement had already been established.

Nevertheless, Principal Artos has built on that tradition by requesting representatives of the local churches, the municipal council, and traditional leadership to serve on the PTA. He has insured that the three authority systems operating in Pohnpei today – the elected government, the church, and traditional leadership – communicate and support the school. Of the schools profiled, Seinwar is the best example of balance among the three authority systems. Whereas in many Pohnpeian communities, school, home, and church remain separate spheres of teaching and learning, in Seinwar the three have aligned.

A unique aspect of Seinwar Elementary School is that the staff is from the same matrilineal line. In other words, the teachers are all related. The school benefits from the situation because of the island tradition of proprietary rights to important skills. A family that claims rights to a certain occupation must carry it out well. For the teachers at Seinwar, performing badly would result in a severe loss of face and prestige for the family. The adaptation of the tradition to the school seems to work since students at Seinwar Elementary consistently score the highest on Pohnpei’s high school entrance test. From an American perspective, Seinwar is an ironic example of nepotism as an effective hiring practice.
Both Principal Amor and Principal Artos have been able to modify Pohnpeian traditions to develop community support for their schools. The urban environment surrounding Ohmine Elementary School, however, prevents Principal Danio Pol from using similar strategies. Developing locally effective approaches to parental involvement, the principal has led Ohmine to become an example of a Pohnpeian school dealing with new urban realities.

Families with children attending Ohmine come from outer islands and all municipalities. Their affiliations to traditional leaders remain strong but geographically distant from their urban residence. While needing to be aware and respectful of traditional authority, Principal Pol cannot appeal to traditional leadership as no single high chief has authority over the diverse school community.

To appeal to Ohmine’s urban, diverse school community, Principal Pol emphasizes technology as a means of interesting parents in the school. He has been successful in gaining U.S. grants to support the expensive enterprise of setting up computer labs and making them accessible to the community.

The principal’s parental involvement strategies are to have the community view the school as a resource and feel ownership of it. To implement those strategies he has led the school purposefully through several initiatives. One activity is to emphasize intergenerational activities. Parents come to the school to continue working with students on oral history projects started at home. Another approach is to keep Ohmine an open campus so facilities are available during and after school hours. Finally, respecting the Pohnpeian preference for decision making by consensus,
Principal Pol has teachers meet with parent groups off-campus to gather input periodically to the school improvement plan.

Strong leadership is common to the three schools’ efforts to involve parents. Each principal views parental involvement primarily as a matter of building community support for the school and each takes his role as leader of the effort to engage the community very seriously. Another important similarity is that at each school the principal has been able to align the three primary authority systems to which Pohnpeians respond in support of the school. The relative influence of the elected system, the church, or the traditional leadership may vary and the means by which the principal has manipulated them into alignment may vary, but the net result is that each authority system plays an active role in supporting Awak, Seinwar, and Ohmine Elementary Schools.

Parental involvement in Pohnpei, as promoted by the principals at the three schools profiled, varies in response to the community. The principal’s social standing, shifting demographics, and the contemporary flux of Pohnpeian culture combine to influence the approach each principal takes. As a result, parental/community involvement is very localized and varies from school to school.
Chapter 7. Research Questions Redux

In Chapter 5, I detailed the conversations of twelve focus groups and summarized themes that surfaced. In Chapter 6, I described three interviews with school principals and found their efforts at parental involvement to be examples that other Pohnpeian schools could learn from. The summaries of both chapters respond to research questions presented in Chapter 1, specifically, what themes emerged from focus group discussions on parental involvement and what examples of effective parental involvement have developed. It seemed appropriate to address those questions at the end of the chapters that provided the data.

At the end of this chapter, I will address my basic content questions, “Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei, and, if so, what is the nature of the problem?” At this point, however, I will respond to the set of process questions that provided the guideposts for my cross-cultural research, beginning with whether or not the methodological approach worked.

Did the method work to elicit useful data?

The method I followed could be characterized as a set of standard techniques with cross-cultural adaptations. I conducted a literature review of parental involvement to anchor the issue in research. However, I also reviewed the Pohnpeian contextual factors of history, differences in formal and informal education, and authority structures so as not to limit my interpretation of data to an American perspective. I chose a research-based tool as a framework, but let it sit lightly on conversations so that Pohnpeian participants could reshape it to their own meaning. I
conducted focus groups at a School Community Forum, but was sure to obtain an invitation to do so and asked the appropriate official to issue a dispensation from conversational constraint so that participants could speak freely without regard to age, social rank or gender. I conducted interviews with the understanding that the principals could review and edit sections of the write up that they were uncomfortable with. No revisions were requested, but the offer was important.

Did the method work? The answer is yes, beyond my expectations. The focus groups and interviews elicited in a wealth of information and the research base provided relevant insights on which to base may assessment of parental involvement in education in Pohnpei.

What American-based research initiatives in parental involvement are relevant to the situation as articulated by Pohnpeian parents?

The American research I surveyed looked at barriers and benefits of parental involvement in education. The literature alerted me to issues that might be important to understanding how Pohnpeian parents think about their involvement. Also, more than twenty years’ work by American researchers led to a summary typology that identified six categories of activities that mark effective parental involvement. I used the typology as a point of departure, a common definitional understanding for me and the Pohnpeian parents who participated in the School Community Partnership Forum.

Regarding barriers to involvement, parents' comments about the situation in Pohnpei echoed two lines of American research. One was the notion of teacher hesitancy to interact with parents and the other the dichotomy between home and school. However, although teacher-parent distrust and a home-school dichotomy are
relevant to parental involvement in Pohnpei, the manifestations of the issues are
different there than in the U.S.

A dichotomy between home and school may be too strong a descriptor for the
situation in Pohnpei. In the multi-cultural society of the United States,
misunderstandings can be expected between the mainstream culture reflected at
school and the diverse cultures functioning at home. In Pohnpei, however, the society
is more culturally homogeneous. Still, the institutions of formal education have been
adopted from an outside culture. From the comments made in the focus groups,
parents showed suspicion rather than confusion toward the differences between home
and school. They expressed concern that the school system engendered the cultural
standards of the society it was taken from. In other words, parents were afraid that the
schools were undermining Pohnpeian values.

It is interesting to note that the teachers who participated in the focus groups
tended to express themselves as parents. The demographic breakdown of Forum
participants shows a fairly equal distribution among those who signed in as teachers
and as parents. However, there were few comments that were supportive of teachers
or critical of parents. When asked to speak about parental involvement, teachers put
aside their role as teacher and opted instead to participate as parents. Their choice of
role would indicate that they perceived a difference between the culture of school and
home and chose to express their perspective as parents as a means of criticizing the
system in which they worked.

Parent-teacher interactions were evidently hesitant and distrustful, but the
relationship between the parents and teachers in Pohnpei is complicated. Teaching
positions are the most numerous among the few salaried jobs available. Given the intricacy and extensive reach of the peneinei, the extended family, most families benefit financially from having a teacher within their ranks. Criticism of teachers, therefore, must be tempered by the need to respect the monetary contribution that a teacher provides. There is also the issue of who may criticize whom. Teachers are enmeshed in the traditional title system, making it difficult for parents to criticize a teacher who holds a higher title than they.

The criticisms that Pohnpeian parents levy against teachers focus on absenteeism and capability. Parents, mothers in particular, complain when their children’s classes are dismissed because the teacher is absent. At other times, often in the forum of a PTA meeting, parents complain that their children are not learning because teachers are not well qualified. Valid as they may be, the complaints tend to make teachers defensive and understandably hesitant to interact with parents.

In terms of the benefits of parental involvement in education, a primary emphasis in current U.S. research is to show that it influences student academic achievement. At a meeting I attended in Washington, D.C. for directors of federally funded parental involvement projects, a representative of the U.S. Department of Education emphasized the point. He stressed that projects must link parental involvement to improved student academic performance if they expected funding to continue. Affective benefits shown by research, like better relationships between teachers and parents, were irrelevant from the administration’s point of view.

At the Pohnpei School Community Forum, a concern for student achievement was among the themes that emerged from the focus groups. Additionally, however,
the need to improve rapport and respect between parents and teachers was frequently mentioned. Parents in Pohnpei repeated the need to establish partnerships with teachers in the spirit of unity, harmony, and cooperation. There was no doubt expressed in their conversations that parents and teachers working together would improve students’ school performance.

*How effective was the American-based definition of parental involvement to Pohnpeian parents’ discussions on the topic?*

Two factors influenced my decision to use Epstein’s categorization of six types of parental involvement as I looked into the topic in Pohnpei. First, I needed to proceed from a recognized research base, and Epstein’s typology has emerged as a widely respected model. Second, I needed to share a mutually understandable definition with participating parents so that I could interpret their comments with assurance that we were speaking of the same thing.

The six-part definition worked very well for me during both the focus groups and the interviews. It proved to be a useful framework to elicit comments in a systematic manner and so was a good tool to gather descriptive information. The six categories were understandable to Pohnpeians and served to limit group discussions to a given aspect of the broader topic. As a guiding format behind the principals’ interviews, the categories served to keep me focused as an interviewer. For me as a researcher, part of the utility of Epstein’s categories lay in the structure they provided for drawing out Pohnpeians attitudes and localized definitions of parental involvement.
Another useful aspect of using the typology was in my review, analysis and interpretation of the focus group and principal comments. As I struggled with the abundance of information, it was helpful to group data into those that fit into the typology and those that were particularly Pohnpeian. With that distinction, it became clear how the parents and principals were re-defining parental involvement in their own terms. Looking at participants' comments as re-definitions, I could uncover themes and underlying issues that resulted in a distinctive description to parental involvement in Pohnpei. On the other hand, keeping within the American interpretation of the categories, I could identify strengths in some of the activities that were described. For example, Principal Danio Pol collaborates with the community just as the research defines it: to draw community resources into the school.

For Pohnpeians, however, the categories were not as neatly delineated as presented in the typology. The boundaries between parenting and learning at home were fuzzy. Four separate groups discussed those categories, two on parenting and two on learning at home. The discussions among the four groups were quite similar, blending the categories into one. Then the two groups discussing collaborating with the community interpreted it as an extension of parenting. The notion of volunteering sent two other groups on tangential discussions about motivation, and conversations about communication and decision making became contentious.

Neither the focus groups nor the principals were particularly interested in talking about parental involvement in terms of the categories. Rather, they took advantage of my raising the topic and providing a forum as an opportunity to indulge in uncharacteristic behavior. As became clear, the focus groups had their own set of
themes to discuss and they seemed most happy for an opportunity to complain. For their part, the principals were proud to expand on their leadership role in community involvement and they seemed most happy for the opportunity to brag. For me, on the other hand, the typological definition of parental involvement was most useful as a mooring in the torrent of information that resulted when parents and principals were given the opportunity to express themselves.

*Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei’s schools?*

Interviews with school principals gave a more optimistic picture of parental involvement than the 2002 Pohnpei School Community Forum proceedings. The interviews reflected the situation as practiced at three different schools and gave evidence of a good deal of family-school cooperation with less contentiousness than one might have suspected had the only evidence been the Forum notes and comments. Still, the principals’ comments repeated the concerns expressed by the participants of the Forum, adding to the evidence of tension between homes and schools. Is there a problem with parental involvement? Collectively, the comments of principals and parents answer with an emphatic “yes.”

In effect, parents accuse schools of not functioning. Classes are not held consistently. When teachers are absent their students are sent home because the system cannot provide substitutes. Principal Amor at Awak Elementary School noted that the most frequent and vocal complaint from mothers was that classes were dismissed because teachers were absent.

The problem with teacher absenteeism, however, involves more than a lack of resources to pay substitute teachers. There are administrative issues concerning lack
of enforcement of teacher attendance policies. A study done in 1998 by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning found that teacher and administrator absenteeism in Pohnpei's schools was among the highest in the Pacific region. On average, Pohnpei's teachers missed twelve school days a year. State level administrators were absent nineteen days. Speaking with me on this point, the Department of Education Fiscal Officer mentioned that teachers' pay is not docked if they are absent. Teachers get their salary whether they go to school or not.

In addition to accusations of excessive absenteeism, parents also criticize public school teachers for being unqualified and uncommunicative. Parents are aware that parochial school children perform quite well academically and accuse public school teachers of being unprepared to bring their children to comparable levels of achievement. Parents also complain that teachers do not inform them of classroom learning objectives. Teachers do not invite parents to come to school, nor do they provide parents with guidance on how to help students with homework.

Both Forum comments and principal interviews mention the need to clarify learning objectives. Because, as the Forum participants noted, parents don't know what is going on in the classroom, and because, according to Principal Pol, parents compare student achievement in public schools unfavorably to that in to private schools, the situation has deteriorated to the point where parents accuse teachers of incompetence. Nevertheless, parents are willing to defer to teachers' authority in matters of instruction. Parents consistently express willingness to help with

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homework, but just as consistently acknowledge their lack of confidence in doing so. Parents want to form a partnership with teachers but need help. In return for information about what is happening in the classroom and assistance in ways to help with homework, parents are ready to work with their children at home in order to improve their academic performance.

An additional aspect to parents' lack of understanding of teaching and learning objectives is a suspicion that classroom activities may be undermining tradition. Parents are quite certain of their capacity to transmit Pohnpeian values but they question the influence of Western style education on their children. They wonder whether the American system of education that Pohnpeian has adopted is Americanizing their children.

In terms of reciprocal rights and responsibilities, parents acknowledge the schools' right to enroll well-behaved, properly respectful Pohnpeian students. By acknowledging the schools' right, parents concurrently accept the responsibility to prepare their children appropriately. They claim they are meeting that responsibility and no one questions them. In fact, the interviewed principals' lack of comment or complaint about student decorum or behavioral readiness for school would validate the parents' claim and acknowledge families' parenting skills. In return for fulfilling their responsibility, parents feel they have the right to expect the school to provide an adequate education. Overwhelmingly, parents do not feel that schools are accepting the responsibility to do so.

Is there a problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei? Yes. Parents feel unwelcome at school. They do not know what is being taught in the classroom. They
do not know how to help with schoolwork. They suspect that schools are undermining Pohnpeian values. They know that teachers are absent much too frequently. They feel that teachers are unqualified. From their perspective, parents do not feel that schools are doing their job.

What is the nature of the problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei?

Repeatedly, participants at the School Community Forum called for talks to clarify roles and responsibilities. They wanted to examine fundamental values underlying the adopted model of American education. They wanted input in policies to ensure that teaching occurred consistently and that information was available to them so they could help their children. However, they did not feel they were welcome to participate.

Open communication is critical at this time, not as a category of parental involvement, but as the mechanism to bridge the gap between home and school in Pohnpei. When the principal of Ohmine states that “Everyone is afraid of someone, so the children are afraid of no one,” he is not accusing parents of raising ill-disciplined children. Rather, he is recognizing that when parents and teachers are not in close communication, inconsistency in adult-child relationships can lead to discipline problems. As such, he echoes the Forum call for unity.

Currently, communication problems exist at two levels: locally between home and school, and administratively between the central office and individual schools. When the Forum participants note, “They are not doing what they say they are doing,” who “they” are is typically vague. “They” may refer to absent teachers, to
teachers with inadequate content knowledge or pedagogical skills. Teachers and parents remain separated and mutually suspicious regarding teacher job performance.

However, “they” also refers to the central staff members who take nineteen days off in addition to summer vacation and who may be too naïve to question the American school model. As one group reporter put it, their attention on fame, authority, and riches keeps them F-A-R from the local schools. The central office “they” have not been open to dialog and have not encouraged parental partnership in decision making. Although appointed through an ostensibly democratic system, central office staff do not collectively seem to feel any reciprocal obligations. Rather they are perceived as acting unilaterally and autocratically. They do not seek consensus. Also, as beneficiaries of American style education, they exhibit the values of individualism which justify their self-serving ways but which disassociate them from the broader community.

As identified by focus groups and confirmed through principal interviews, current communication patterns from school to home tend to be top down and unilateral. The central staff tells schools what to do and the school principal determines what parents must do. School-home dialog lacks the reciprocal, two-way communication loop that U.S.-based research emphasizes as important. It would be superficial, however, to characterize the nature of the problem with parental involvement in Pohnpei simply as inadequate communication. More fundamentally, communication is not occurring as Pohnpeian culture proscribes it should.

Earlier I described Pohnpeian authorized consensus, a traditional decision-making process. The model shows how Pohnpei’s hierarchical system of chiefly titles
institutionalizes input to decisions. Men holding lower-tier titles have authority over
smaller geographical areas and populations. In return for his title, the title-holder
takes responsibility for listening to the community. When families meet and talk
informally he pays attention to issues of community interest. As consensus develops,
he is authorized to invite a spokesperson or take the conversations himself to a larger
group. Thus an authorized invitation is the mechanism by which the ideas raised in
informal conversations are taken to increasingly formalized groups and ultimately
reach the ear of the high chief. Decisions handed down reflect the input that has come
up from the community. Pohnpeians are comfortable with this system of participating
in decisions. It retains their respect of hierarchy but nonetheless provides a method to
enfranchise the entire citizenry.

Pohnpei’s American model of formal education, however, has no procedures
that replicate traditional decision-making. In the current situation the elected
government invests authority and encourages communication from the top down. The
Governor appoints the Director of Education. The Director hires Central Staff,
teachers, and appoints principals. The Director and Central Staff make decisions on
all aspects of the educational system and expect the principals to implement them. No
one is tasked with listening to parents and moving their concerns upward.

As it operates in Pohnpei, the elected system actually insulates the Department
of Education from the community and allows the governor-appointed Director of
Education to act unilaterally, a behavior that Pohnpeians dislike. A synthesis of
bottom-up democratic decision making and the traditional top-down but consensual
format has not occurred between the Department of Education and Pohnpei’s school communities.

Home-school communication stops because it is not invited. An individual Pohnpeian feels at risk in expressing an opinion where he or she has not been invited to do so. That may explain why principals hear little from parents except complaints from mothers who exercise their traditional right to guard and nurture their children. Issues of governance do not come up in PTA meetings because no one is authorized to raise them. Even if such issues were raised, there is no mechanism for moving the concerns to a higher level. The principal takes orders from the Director of Education but is not authorized, in the Pohnpeian sense, to relay parents’ concerns for policy consideration.

Neither is the PTA president. As an elected office, the position reflects the democratic notion that individuals have the right to invest authority in persons of their choice. But Pohnpeians, for whom authority has a spiritual element that is pre-ordained and handed down, may not feel empowered by voting. On the contrary, they may feel they are being disrespectful in claiming the equality inherent to democratic procedures. Most PTA presidents are men with titles in their respective communities, so their election may be a confirmation of parents’ respect for the traditional system more than a choice of a spokesperson. Nevertheless, there may also be an attendant hope that the PTA President/ title-holder will provide the necessary link upward to the Department of Education. Yet traditional titles do not give the PTA President authority in the area of education.
Patterns of democratic participation in education have not translated well into Pohnpeian culture. Democratic opportunities for parents to speak out individually and to have an equal vote run contrary to Pohnpeian notions of proper authority. The borrowed educational system, based as it is on democratic notions of individual and equal participation, cuts off rather than promotes communications between home and school. Ironically, Pohnpeian parents have been disenfranchised by democracy.
Chapter 8. Recommendations and implications

The eager and enthusiastic participation of parents, teachers, and principals supported my assumption that public dialog concerning parental involvement had been lacking in Pohnpei. The community seemed to welcome my research and as an outsider I felt a responsibility to give something back. Therefore I tried to structure my investigation to provide Pohnpeians a variety of opportunities to communicate on an important topic. As I gathered data, parents raised thought-provoking issues and principals articulated their successes in a meaningful and culturally appropriate manner.

During the data analysis I also tried to find a benefit for those who were helping me. It was serendipitous, rather than planned, that the transcription and translation process provided an extended Pohnpeian family in Honolulu with a rich language resource from home. The rhetoric of extemporaneous speech, so prized among Pohnpeians, is rarely heard in Honolulu. The videotaped oral reports were wonderful examples and introduced a group of young Hawaii-born Pohnpeians to a use of their language that they had not been exposed to. Their involvement with the transcription and translation became an exercise in language and cultural preservation.

The recommendations that follow are directed to the parents and educators of Pohnpei and are offered in a similar spirit of giving back to reciprocate for the richness of my research experience and the cooperation they extended to me. Having
identified dysfunctional communications as the central problem with parental involvement, I offer suggestions on ways to move dialog forward.

Beyond Pohnpei, however, the community-home-school issues that Pohnpeian parents have identified, as well as the solutions they are developing, are meaningful to a number of educational contexts. The implications I note are directed to educators working in a multi-cultural environment where the need for partnership among people of diverse backgrounds is acknowledged but difficult to achieve.

**Recommendations**

Public education in Pohnpei is at a very exciting juncture. The School Community Partnership Forum and principal interviews give evidence that families are ready to engage in shaping education and have ideas on how to do so. In the past, the various meetings of Pohnpeian culture with outside forms of education have resulted in a synthesis of values. Traditional Pohnpeian values are modified, but incoming ideas are shaped by and adapted to traditional forms. Take for example the way the intense spiritual tradition of Pohnpei has found a viable expression through Christianity. In the contemporary context of rapid social and economic change, the synthesis between the old and the new is unclear. Reacting to that uncertainty, families are calling for clarification of roles and responsibilities in education, the better to shape their children’s educational experience and future. Enhancing parental involvement in education in Pohnpei can bring the collective wisdom of the community to bear on shaping their children and Pohnpeian culture itself.

One critical issue is the distrust and tension between parents and teachers. School-community conversations that focus on learning objectives can help defuse
what has become a volatile situation. In response to a similar situation and under the auspices of a federally funded Parental Information and Resource Center grant, Marshall Islands’ educators have developed a model of school-governance called “Cluster PTA”. It has shown promise by making classroom standards and benchmarks the focus to bring teachers and parents together.

In the cluster format, the traditional whole-school PTA is broken into three clusters, one for grades one through three, another for grades four through six, and the last for grades seven and eight. Each cluster elects officers, and those people serve as a school advisory committee to handle administrative and school-wide concerns. Within the clusters, parents and teachers focus on classroom activities; what the children are studying, what methods teachers are using, and what parents can do to help.

*Figure 7. Cluster PTA*
At several schools in the Marshall Islands, the model has succeeded in reducing what American researchers identify as a hesitancy of teachers to engage with parents. Parents attend regularly and in greater numbers than before. Conversations center on classroom achievement and take place in what observers have said to be a mutually respectful environment. These results mirror observations from U.S. research showing that carefully engineered parent-teacher encounters improve rapport and respect. In addition, as a governance structure, the model acknowledges the principal as the leader of the school, leaving intact a hierarchical authority structure that is attractive to islanders. For Pohnpeian schools, the Cluster PTA model may provide the mechanism to forward parent concerns and input to decisions upward from grade level clusters to the school committee.

As “island” as the model may be, however, it is Marshallese, not Pohnpeian. If adopted as developed in the Marshalls, Cluster PTAs in Pohnpei would still lack representation of the three authority systems that play such an integral role in community life. At the School Advisory Committee level, therefore, a Pohnpeian adaptation of Cluster PTA would expand membership to include the chief magistrate or a municipal council member, representation of the major churches in the community, and a representative of the traditional leadership.

If replicated, the model may help involve Pohnpeian parents more in school governance. Decision making, one of Epstein’s categories of parental involvement, is noticeably weak in Pohnpei. In Pohnpei, the involvement of parents in decision making has been reactive, that is, they are involved in order to complain. Part of the
problem, as noted at the Forum, was the extent to which parents want to be involved as opposed to how much they will be allowed to be involved.

With little previous experience with governance, however, parents may be unaware of the range of issues that go into running a school. Examining school-community based management from a Pacific perspective Keres Petrus, a Chuukese educator, identifies personnel as one of the areas of school governance in which island parents want to be more involved. Budgeting, facilities, curriculum, instruction and assessment are other topics for community members to examine.68 For Pohnpeian schools and communities that are beginning to forge partnerships in education, Ms. Petrus’ paper would be a useful read.

One currently contentious issue that bears discussion in the Cluster PTA or other venue is the suspicion that schools are undermining traditional values. Where American research approaches the home-school dichotomy as a cross-cultural mismatch, in Pohnpei the situation is more an intra-cultural misunderstanding. Parents want to know how the school mirrors home values, but teachers are more concerned with how parents support school learning objectives. One way to approach the tension between parents and teachers might be to separate the two issues with two of Epstein’s categorical headings. Discussing “parenting” can open discussions to address the suspicion that schools are promoting individualism over Pohnpeian notions of collectivity. The issue is highly charged and the air needs to be cleared thoughtfully. Using the power of categorization to deal with the issue independently

can only help. Later conversations focusing on "learning at home" can be limited to those activities that support school-based learning objectives.

As evidenced by the interviews with the principals of Awak, Seinwar, and Ohmine, creative and locally relevant solutions to parents’ concerns are evolving. For example, there are a number of reasons why teacher absenteeism is difficult for communities to address. At Seinwar, however, a policy was put in place that seems to work. Other school communities might profit from hearing more about the policy and how it was developed. Similarly, good information about bringing in community services and engaging church and traditional leaders’ support is available and can be shared among school communities. Once Pohnpei’s schools and communities develop ways to facilitate mutual and supportive communications, they will find no lack of local expertise and models to consider.

**Implications**

As significant as a cross-cultural examination of parental involvement in Pohnpei may be, the approach has implications well beyond that small island state. In the continental United States, educators promoting parental involvement in education could benefit from paying more attention to cultural matters. Teachers and administrators need to take care when working with children and parents from backgrounds that differ from their own. Research offers theories on the barriers to parental involvement among marginalized or disenfranchised groups, but has not offered ways to enter conversations with them. In Pohnpei, following the protocol of invitation enabled discourse to begin. Similarly critical, when working cross-culturally, is making the effort to find the appropriate means of approaching them.
American educators must learn to take nothing for granted when dealing with parents from a culture different than their own. The typical open, friendly, and direct approach of a kind-hearted middle class educator can easily be misconstrued. Openness may be seen as naiveté, even childish. Friendliness may seem frivolous, lacking seriousness. A direct approach may seem aggressive. As the poet Robert Burns said in “To a Louse,” “O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us”! Mainstream American educators would do well to step back to observe how adults from other societies interact before initiating involvement activities. First impressions may well signal whether one is willing to partner with parents or expects them to conform.

Partnering is based on reciprocity, a value highly prized but not unique to Pohnpei by any means. Educators would do well to keep reciprocity in mind when dealing with parents from varying cultures. Parents may have very different perspectives on the give and take of parental involvement.

Schools, of course, take responsibility for the academic development of children. Conversations on standards can be an opening to parents to explore ways to partner in the endeavor. If the school can be clear on what it is teaching, parents can better determine how they can help at home. The clarity of communications on academic matters between educators and parents must be the responsibility of the educators. Jargon injures communications and alienates parents. If educators only speak to other educators, parents are left out with no reciprocal response to exclusionary professionalism.
Forging a home-school partnership to educate children may require parents and educators to examine their most fundamental values. In Pohnpei, parents were suspicious of individualism and how the schools might be promoting it to the detriment of their collective social organization. However, in the American context, individualism is part and parcel of democracy, promoting it has been an historically explicit purpose of public education. Can such fundamental differences of opinion be reconciled? Perhaps not, but overlooking differences in values because one cannot recognize them leaves both parents and educators in ignorance. Reciprocal and respectful dialog, similar to what Pohnpeian parents call for, must include an examination of the foundational values of education whenever multiple societies join to school their children.

As American schools typically reflect the majority culture, they may have difficulty meeting the challenges of increasingly diverse student populations. In Pohnpei, parents suspect that American style education has created a school culture that varies from the home culture of the students. Similarly, school cultures in areas with shifting demographics may no longer reflect the home culture of their students.

Consider, for example, the current dilemma of Pearl City High School on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. The principal of the school contacted Harvey Lee, a colleague of mine who works with Safe and Drug Free projects. The principal asked for advice on how to work with the Filipino-American students who have become a majority at the school. Not long ago, Pearl City High was the center of a stable working class Japanese-American community. Historically the faculty and administration, primarily of Japanese ancestry, held high expectations for the
students, and students excelled. A large percentage of them went on to college. Times changed, older Japanese families moved elsewhere and young Filipino families moved in. The same faculty had difficulty understanding the behavior and motivation of these new students. Student academic achievement declined, fewer students went on to college, and school climate deteriorated. The culture of the school and the culture of the community had diverged.

The situation in Pearl City is not uncommon. Can improved parental involvement make a difference? Research indicates that it can, but how does such involvement get started in situations where there is cultural divergence between the school and parents? How can the culture of the school and the culture of the community realign? The islanders of Pohnpei offer a workable suggestion. Meet with mutual respect, in unity and harmony, to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in our children’s education.
Appendix: Focus Group Guiding Questions in English and Pohnpeian

Groups 1 & 2

Collaborating with the Community: What are the community resources around your school? What stores and other businesses, churches, organizations or clubs are in the community? All of them should be aware of what is going on at the school and all should support the school.

What’s happening now?

What connections are there between schools and communities?

How does it happen?

What else can happen?

How can it be improved?

What are the barriers to community-school connections?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Ehu ong kousoan akan (Collaborating with the Community)

Soangen elen sawas da me mie nan kousoan akan? Karasepe, soangen stohwa de pesines da me mic, mwomwohdiso, pwihn kokoudahkan nan wehi? Koaros pali pwukat anahne wehwehki dahme wihwiawi nan skuhl oh utung doadohk en skuhl.

Dahme wihwiawi ansou wet?
   Dahme kin kadokepene skuhl oh wehi?
   Ia mwomwen dok pene wet ah kin wiawi?
   Dahme konenhng en pil wiawi?

Ia mwomwen dok pene wet ah kak kamwahula?
   Dahme kin kerempwa dok penehn skuhl oh wehi?
   His me ahniki manaman en katikala kerempw pwukat?

Ia mwomwen dok pene wet ah kak kamwahula?
Learning at Home: Involving parents in their children's school lessons is important, but it is difficult to do until teachers and parents work together.

What’s happening now?

What do parents do to help their children with schoolwork?

What else can they do?

How can it be improved?

What are the barriers to parents’ helping their children more?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Kaiahn en seri nan kousoan akan (Learning at Home)

Sawasepen peneinei ohng arail tungoal serih kan nan wasahn kousoan akan inenen kesempwal me pid homework, ahpw E pahn apwal ma peneinei oh sounpadahk sohte ehu pene.

Dahme wihwiawi ansou wet?

Dahme peneinei kin wia pwehn sewese serih kan ohng Arail tungoal homework?
Dahme peneinei pil kak wia?

Ia mwomwen sawas wet ah kak kamwahula?
Dahme keremmpwa peneinei en kak sawas mwuledek sang dahme mie?
Ihs me ahni ki manaman en katikala kerempw wet?
Ia mwomwen sawas pwukat ah kak kamwahula?
**Decision Making:** The kinds of decisions that parents can be involved with depends on two things: how much parents want to be involved, and how much the State DOE allows them to be involved.

What's happening now?

What role do parents have in decision making?

How does it happen?

What else can they do?

How can it be improved?

What are the barriers to more parent involvement in decision making?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Koasoanepen Plan (madamadau) (Decision making)

Koasondi en plan me peneinei kak iang patehng oh koasonchdi kin idawehn ire riau:
(1) Ia wen peneinei ar men iang sawas? Oh (2) Ia wen sawas me DOE kak mweidohng peneinei?

Dahme wihwiawi ansou wet?

Ia wasa madamadau en peneinei kin kak pidolong ie?

Ia mwomwen eh kin wiawi?

Dahme peneinei pil kak iang wia?

Ia mwomwen koasondi en plan akan ar kak kamwahula?

Dahme kerempwa peneinei en kak kapidolong ar madamadau?

His me ahniki manaman en katikala kerempw pwukat?

Ia mwomwen koasondi en madamadau pwukat ah kak kamwahula?
Communicating: What kind of information do schools send to parents? And what kind of information do parents send to the school?

What’s happening now?

What do parents and schools communicate about?

How does it happen?

How can communication be improved?

What are the barriers to communication?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Dok penehn madamadou (Communicating)

Ia mwomwen pakair akan me skuhl kin kadar ohng peneinei? Oh ia mwomwen pakair kan me peneinei kin kadar ohng skuhl?

Dahme wihwiawi ansou wet?

Dahme peneinei oh skuhl kak wia pwe arail tungoal madamadou en kak dok pene mwahu?

Ia mwomwen eh kak wiawi?

Ia mwomwen dok penehn madamadou ah kak kamwahula?

Iahnge kerempw kan me pid dok penehn madamadou?

Ihs me ahniki manaman en katikala kerempw pwukat?

Ia mwomwen kamwahula pwukat ah kak pweida?
Volunteering: How do parents help the school?

What’s happening now?

What do parents do for the schools now?

How does it happen?

What else can they do?

How can it be improved?

What are the barriers to parents’ doing more for the school?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Sawas ni Soh Isepe (Volunteering)

Ia duen peneinei ah kin kak sawas ohng skuhl ni soh isepe?

   Dahm wihwiawi ansou wet?
   Dahme peneinei kin sawas kiohng skuhl
   ansou wet?
   Ia mwomwen sawas pwukat ah kin wiawi?

   Dahme peneinei pil kak wia palilah sang
   met?

   Ia mwomwen sawas pwukat ah kak kamwahula?
   Ia kerempw kan ohng peneinei me kin
   irehdi sawas en peneinei ohng skuhl?
   Ihs me ahniki manaman en katikala
   kahpwal pwukat?

   Ia mwomwen kamwahula pwukat ah kak
   pweida?
Parenting: Parenting is the way to raise your children. When we talk about parenting and school, we mean the things parents can do to be sure their children are ready for school.

What’s happening now?

What do parents do to prepare their children for school?

What else can they do?

How can it be improved?

What barriers keep parents from helping their children’s readiness for learning at school?

Who has the authority to reduce the barriers?

How must it happen?
Pwukoahn Peneinei (Parenting)

Pwukoahn peneinei ohng kairada seri. Ansoun me kitail kin kosoia pwukoaw wet oh skuhl, kitail mamahsanih dahme peneinei kak wia iong ara tungoal serio pwe eh kaunopada ohng skuhl en kak itar. Kitail anahne tehk ada peidek pwukat:

Dahme wihwiawi ansou wet?

Dahme peneinei konehng wia pwehn kaunopada serio ohng skuhl?

Dahme peneinei pil kak wia likin met?

Iaduen pwukoaw wet ah kak kamwahula?

Dahme kerempwa sawas en peneinei ohng seri pwehn kak Kaunopada serio mwohn skuhl ah pahn tepda?

Ihs me ahniki manaman en katikala kerempw pwukat?

Ia mwomwen wekidekla wet ah pahn pweida?
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awak</td>
<td>an elementary school taking its name from an area in Um municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iso Nanken</td>
<td>a high title in the Nanken line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaiahn</td>
<td>training, childrearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapingimarangi</td>
<td>a Polynesian atoll with ties to Pohnpei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitti</td>
<td>one of Pohnpei's five municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolonia</td>
<td>the urban center of Pohnpei, the Spanish, German, Japanese, American and now Pohnpeian government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limesekidil</td>
<td>a woman of great influence, the highest ranking in her clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madelonimwh</td>
<td>one of Pohnpei's five municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menwai</td>
<td>an American or other outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimin</td>
<td>heartfelt cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwoakilloa</td>
<td>an outlying island of Pohnpei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahnmwarki</td>
<td>the paramount chief of a municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanken</td>
<td>the highest position among the chiefs that parallel the nahnmwarki line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neitik</td>
<td>to give birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net</td>
<td>one of Pohnpei’s five municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nukuoro</td>
<td>an outlying island of Pohnpei</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ohmine</th>
<th>an elementary school taking its name from an area in Net municipality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>peneinei</td>
<td>the Pohnpeian extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pingelap</td>
<td>an outlying island of Pohnpei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sapwuafik</td>
<td>an outlying island of Pohnpei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seinwar</td>
<td>an elementary school taking its name from an area in Kitti municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sohte</td>
<td>a negative marker that can mean no, none, not enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokehs</td>
<td>one of Pohnpei's five municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>one of Pohnpei's five municipalities</td>
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Bibliography


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Pohnpei (pōn'pe) (KEY), state and island (1991 est. pop. 52,000), 129 sq mi (334 sq km), W Pacific, in the E Caroline Islands. It is one of four states comprising the Federated States of Micronesia. A volcanic island, Pohnpei is a flat dome of black basaltic rock, rising to 2,595 ft (791 m), with a rim of fertile coastal land. Copra, dried bonito, and handicrafts are the chief products. Ruins of ancient stone walls, dikes, and basaltic columns dot the island. Pohnpei was formerly called Ponape and Ascension Island.