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**School-Family-Community  
Collaborations**

**Retrospective on what has been done  
and what has been learned**

**Volume 1**

**School-Family Relations**



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## Introduction

It is on the perspective of promoting student perseverance and success and, conversely, preventing dropping out of school that the PÉRISCOPE network's current approach is based. All the more so since academic success appears to depend in part on the synergy and quality of the relationships between individuals and the living environments of children and adolescents. It must be noted that a great deal of national and international work has been done on school-family-community (SFC) collaboration over the past four decades. In other words, regardless of the continent, country or language spoken, practitioners and researchers have common concerns and similar challenges (Deslandes, 2009c). It would be completely unrealistic to attempt to conduct a literature review that would report all of the works that have been done over these years, since there has been a burgeoning knowledge about the substantial contribution of families and communities to young people's educational success and development. It should be noted that the parent/family-school collaboration referred to here, falls under the umbrella of SFC collaboration. This collaboration is also part of the research on effective schools and the movement towards school improvement and greater openness to the community (e.g., Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). However, the development of these collaborative relationships appears rather complex (Deslandes, Barma, & Morin, 2015). How, then, can such relationships between educators, families and the community be promoted?

We will attempt to highlight advances in knowledge and promising practices that have been developed as a result of two literature reviews that analyzed over 150 publications each: (1) the first one addressed elements of the family, school and community context that influence the health and well-being, including success, of young people (Deslandes, 2001a); (2) the second one dealt with school-family, school-community relations with two sub-themes: extracurricular programs and the integration of services offered to students and their families (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001). The latter report also included a meta-analysis project. However, the meta-analysis project was thwarted because there were few studies identified that had a common theme and used the same statistical analyses. The 56 empirical studies that were analyzed were grouped as follows: studies of programs related to academic achievement, small-scale and large-scale studies, studies conducted in Quebec and Canada, studies conducted outside Canada, and studies involving immigrant students.

Rather than revisiting the results of these two reviews, as was our original intention, we have chosen to simply include them in the references illustrating the advancement of knowledge. In fact, it is a matter of assessing what has been done and understood in order to avoid hovering or repeating the work already done. Far from us the ambition to present in an exhaustive manner the work carried out on this theme. This retrospective is based on written material (oral communications are not included); it is not intended to be linear, nor does it reflect an order of priority given to certain issues. Rather, it reports on attempts to address current issues and to concentrate more on educational success.

The first part of the paper focuses on some definitions and theoretical models. The second part looks at family processes and the benefits associated with them. Two subsections are discussed: (1)

the role of the parent educator, the contextual characteristics and the social cognitions, and (2) school-family relations in primary and secondary schools. The third section examines the role of the school in school-family relations while the fourth discusses the training of educators with regard to collaborative school-family relations. The fifth section covers the thorny issue of evaluating partnership programs, while the sixth and seventh sections present examples of initiatives based on Epstein's work in Quebec, as well as examples of research-intervention aimed at alleviating tensions that inexorably develop in relationships. Finally, the last section provides a summary of each section and some recommendations.

First, it should be remembered that, at the time, in 2001, despite a political discourse that focused on developing collaboration between schools and families, researchers reported on the existence of a predominant vision of parents in terms of deficit, compensatory measures, and one-way partnerships (Deslandes, 1999, 2001c). This explains our motivation to study this approach further. Why does the literature talk about parental/family involvement or collaboration, especially between school and family? It is simply because parental involvement in schooling is crucial, since parents are by far their child's first and most important teachers (Morris, Taylor, Knight, & Wasson, 1996; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993, cited in Deslandes, 2001b). Better school-family collaboration is therefore a source of primary prevention to promote the success and development of young people (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999, cited in Deslandes, 2001b). It should be noted that the concept of collaboration, rather than school-family relationships, was more widely used in the early years.

## Some basic concepts

### Parental/family involvement

It is important to recall a few definitions that, for some authors (e.g., Bédard, 2009; Larivée, 2011a; Larivée, Bédard, Couturier, Yalubi & Larose, 2017), are sometimes ambiguous. The term parent involvement, increasingly replaced by family involvement (because the latter recognizes the influence of all family members) and translated into French as participation parentale/familiale au suivi scolaire, refers to the role of parents or the family in children's learning and academic success (Christenson et al., 1992, cited in Deslandes, 1996). This concept is multidimensional in nature and may refer, depending on the point of view of young Quebecers, to emotional support from parents, communication with teachers, parent-teacher interactions based on daily school life, and parent-school and parent-teacher communication (Deslandes, 1996, 2005).

According to Quebec parents of elementary school students, there are two dimensions to parental involvement in schooling: (1) participation at home (welcoming and preparing the child for school, supervision, help with time management, follow-up on school work and discussion about school in positive terms), and (2) participation at school (returning telephone calls; signing the agenda and assignments; attending meetings and volunteering) (Deslandes, 2003a; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2004, 2005). According to American authors, the definition of parental involvement varies according to the aspects of the construct that are emphasized. For example, for Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), this construct includes behavioural, personal and cognitive/intellectual components. Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs (2000), on the other hand, define it in accordance to that of parents above, and according to the source and location of parental involvement (at home and at school). In French translations, the authors often use the terms participation, involvement and engagement as synonyms (Larivée, 2011a, 2011b). It seems that the use of these terms, like the terms used in English, is often based on the intuition of the moment (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005). For her part, Deslandes (1996) prefers the use of the term parent /family involvement in schooling adopted as early as 1996 and generally favors to use the term engagement to refer to one of the dimensions of parental style, i.e. parents' warmth.

### School-Family-Community Collaboration

For its part, SFC collaboration, which includes parental/family involvement, is intended to be more general. It corresponds to the sharing of responsibilities between parents, teachers and the community to help students succeed and develop their full potential. Like Christenson et al. (1992, cited in Deslandes, 1999, 2001c, 2010a, 2013b), Deslandes defines school-family collaboration as both an activity and an attitude where the student's interests are the focus. School-family collaboration refers to family responsibilities and the school's role in actualizing parental involvement in schooling. This collaboration therefore develops in the presence of shared responsibilities, mutual trust and open communication between the partners. That is how the expression "school-family relations" has gradually come to be used in the literature (Deslandes, 1999, 2001c, 2006a, 2011a;

Deslandes & Jacques, 2003; Deslandes, Bastien, Lemieux & Fournier, 2006; Larivée, 2011b). The term partnership is also used, but it is used sparingly and is perceived as an ideal to be achieved (Deslandes, 1999, 2001c).

**Parenting style.** As Steinberg, Elmen and Mounts (1989), Deslandes (1996, 2005, 2006a, 2008a) defines parenting style as a general parenting "pattern" that characterizes the behavior of parents toward the child and adolescent and creates the emotional climate of the family. Compared to parenting practices that describe parent-youth interactions in a specific area (e.g., parental involvement in schooling), parenting style relates more to general parent-teen interactions. It is characterized in function of the level of parental warmth/acceptance, supervision and psychological autonomy granting.

**Autonomy.** The notion of autonomy is based on Greenberger's (1982, 1984) concept of psychosocial maturity, which is expressed in three dimensions: work orientation, which includes perseverance, effort, the youth's work skills, the desire to do satisfying work and the ability to enjoy work; identity, which includes self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence and internalization of values; and independence, which includes a sense of control, initiative and self-determination (Deslandes 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2007; Deslandes, Potvin & Leclerc, 2000). It is reflected in the broader definition of educational success.

## Some theoretical models

We have chosen to select five theoretical models because of their specific and complementary conception of school-family relations. Indeed, these models are complementary and one of them may prove more relevant than another, depending on the aims of reading and analysis. In accordance with Laramée and Vallée (1991), we consider that a model is a representation of the moment in which a phenomenon is explained. A model schematizes concepts and illustrates the relationships and oppositions between the various elements. A model can evolve over time as a result of new elements being taken into account. Similarly, to illustrate our perception of the state of knowledge, we will present an integrative model that is intended to be a schema of collaborative school-family relationships. Examples of studies conducted using these models will be presented later.

### Ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological model is undoubtedly the most widely used to date to illustrate the globality and complexity of the academic success and socio-school adaptation of the child/adolescent. The model postulates that the child-adolescent is at the heart of five interrelated and reciprocal systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macro-system, and chronosystem. The microsystem corresponds to the immediate contexts in which the child/adolescent lives, grows and evolves (parents, friends, teachers, etc.). These may include the parent-child relationship at home and the encouragement parents provide their child with respect to learning, effort and academic performance. The mesosystem refers to the relationships between the microsystems in which the child/adolescent lives, such as the relationships between families and teachers. The exosystem refers to the social contexts that the child/adolescent does not frequent, but which nevertheless influence him/her, such as the neighbourhood, the parents' work environment, institutions, etc. The macrosystem is the socio-cultural context in which values, rules and beliefs are found, and which influences stereotypes, racism, etc. The chronosystem reflects changes over time in the individual and between environments and the influence of these changes on other elements of the child/adolescent's ecology. This developmental perspective makes it relevant to study the impact of the social, cognitive and biological maturation of the child/adolescent on interactions in the family and school microsystems (parent-child, child-teacher interactions). Academic success and the socio-school adaptation of the child/adolescent are considered to be the product of several dynamic and interdependent systems. In other words, the intersections between the personal aspects of the developing child/adolescent, the family, and other environments may contribute to different outcomes in terms of academic success, adjustment, and school experiences (Deslandes, 2006a, 2010a, 2013a). Variants of the ecological model have been proposed, such as Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model (1987, 1995, 2011), in which the role of the school as an institution is emphasized.



## Overlapping Spheres of Influence

This model is based on both Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) model and on a social and organizational perspective. The external structure of the model consists of three spheres representing the main contexts in which child /adolescent learns and develops: the family, the school and the community intersecting or not depending on the following four forces: time, that is, age, grade level and social conditions of the time (force A); the characteristics, philosophies and practices of the family (force B); the school (force C); and the community (force D). Some practices are carried out separately and others jointly. The degree of intersection varies according to the level of cooperation and complementarity. The internal structure shows where and how interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence occur between individuals in the family, school and community. These social relationships occur at the institutional and individual levels. All of the connections between educators, parents and the community within and across settings can be represented and studied within this model. The student, the main actor in his / her development and learning, is at the centre of the model. Activities are carried out in partnership to guide and motivate students. The model maintains that, at all times, in the family and in the school, parental involvement can be increased or decreased by the practices of teachers, principals, parents themselves, and students. Such a model relies on a number of communication skills that lead to cooperative and collaborative practices (Deslandes, 2004). Its main contribution over the past decade has undoubtedly been to help determine the elements deemed essential to an effective school-family collaboration program: leadership, teamwork, action plan, implementation plan, funding, collegiality, evaluation, and networking (Epstein et al., 2009; 2019). It is particularly this model that has been used as a lever for integrating a sociocultural approach to examine the links between the characteristics of students, families, and teachers based on collaborative school-family relationships as well as their values, beliefs, and expectations (Deslandes, 2001a). As a reminder, in the majority of our so-called regular schools in Quebec, the notion of partnership takes on a more collaborative meaning. Reciprocal partnerships remain a goal, an objective to be reached.

Based on previous studies, the results of surveys of educators, administrators, students and parents, and as a result of workshops and training activities with teachers, Epstein (2001, 2011, 2019) also developed a typology of six categories of SFC collaborative activities aimed at supporting families and schools in their responsibilities for the success and development of young people. Each of these categories includes different practices that can have an impact on student, parent and teacher behaviors and school climate. Each of these outcomes has been the subject of at least one study (Epstein et al., 2009, 2019). Overall, the six categories of SFC collaborative activities contribute to a comprehensive program applicable to all grade levels (Deslandes, 2006a, 2008b; Deslandes, Bastien & Lemieux, 2006).

A comprehensive and holistic program should include the following six categories of activities related to: (1) basic parental responsibilities (the role of the parent educator, type (1), which help families understand child and adolescent development and establish family conditions conducive to learning; which help the school to know the families, their aspirations and needs and those of their children, thus facilitating subsequent communication; (2) the basic duties of the school to the child



and his/her family (communication, type (2), which relate to information about the school curriculum and the progress of their child, and which include strategies to improve two-way communication with traditional and new technology-based communication media; (3) parental involvement in the school (volunteerism, type (3), which involves parents and other community members who can share their time and talents to support the activities of the school, teachers and students, is manifested through the organization of volunteer work or through a flexible schedule that allows parents to be present at special events; (4) parental involvement in learning at home (type (4), which includes information on academic activities in the classroom, assistance with school work, discussions related to school experience, course selection, etc.). (5) parental participation in decision-making of educational agencies/structures (school, school board, etc.); type (5), which includes representation on the school council, or other parent organizations, and participation and involvement in the school council; (6) community collaboration, which encourages the cooperation of the school and families with community groups, organizations, agencies, and individuals. Connections go in both directions: community resources can be sources of help and enrichment for schools, students, and families. Equally important, schools, students, and families can also be sources of support and enrichment for the community (Deslandes, 2001a; Epstein et al., 2009, 2019). These categories, as shown in the quantitative study by Deslandes, Royer, Potvin and Leclerc (1999), are interrelated. The study conducted by these authors showed that for adolescents enrolled in the regular program, parental activities in learning at home (type (4) contribute to predicting grade scores in French, the mother tongue as well as the time devoted to homework. However, for special education students, activities associated to better grade are related to parenting (role of the parent educator, type (1)) and involvement in learning at home (type (4). Epstein (2019) adds that these categories are not "pure" in the sense that parents and other volunteers (type (3)) can organize a clothing drive while being open to corporate donations (type (6)). As a result, parents can obtain clothing for their child completely free of charge (type (1).

All communities have human, economic, material and social resources that can help improve schools, strengthen families and help students do better in school. Schools can develop "community profiles" to identify programs and services available to teachers, families and students. Others can link with businesses and agencies for special projects (extracurricular programs). Others may work with organizations to increase students' problem-solving skills, internship opportunities, and philanthropy in the community (Epstein et al., 2019). Community connections will be further discussed in the second volume entitled, *School-Community* (Deslandes, 2019).

## Model of the parental involvement process

Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological model and the results of psychological and sociological studies, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) proposed a model that examines the parental involvement process from the point of decision making to participate, and the ways in which parental involvement influences the learning of the child/adolescent. In its revised version (Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2010; Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009), the model, which is bottom-up, includes three categories of motivators at the first level: personal motivators (parental role construction, feeling of self-efficacy in helping the child/adolescent succeed in school),

contextual motivators (invitations to participate from their child and the school), and variables related to the life context (parental skills, knowledge, availability, energy, and family culture). The model argues that parental involvement influences child outcomes through the mechanisms of encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction (instruction), which in turn are mediated by the developmental relevance of parents' strategies and the congruence between their actions and school expectations. The process of parental involvement culminates in the influence on the child/adolescent's outcomes, including learning and development. It is implicit in the model that personal motivators are influenced by parents' prior experiences in their families and schools, and by their current family conditions. Implicit also is the power to modify parents' self-efficacy, to create a school climate conducive to parental involvement, and to support educators in their work with parents and in their ability to take into consideration their living conditions (Deslandes, 2010a, 2012a, 2013a).

## Contextual model of parenting style

Darling and Steinberg's (1993) theoretical model is an extension of Baumrind's (1991) and Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh's (1987) models, in which parental values and the goals of youth socialization are key determinants of parental behavior. These researchers identify two variables associated with parental influence: parenting practices and parenting style. Parenting practices are explained as behaviors defined by a specific content and by the goals targeted in the socialization process. Parenting style refers to a set of attitudes that are communicated to the child and that create an emotional climate through which parenting behaviors are expressed. According to this model, parenting style and parenting practices are partly the result of parents' goals and values, but each of these two parenting variables influences child development through different processes. Parenting practices have a direct effect on the development of specific traits (e.g., autonomy) and behaviors (e.g., social cooperation, public involvement). In essence, they are the mechanisms through which parents directly help their children achieve the goals of the socialization process. Parenting style alters the ability of parents to socialize their children by changing the effectiveness of parenting practices. From this perspective, parenting style can be described as a contextual variable that moderates the influence of parenting practices on child development in two ways: (a) by transforming the nature of the parent-child interaction and, consequently, by modifying the influence of parenting practices on child development, and (b) by influencing the child's personality, especially his/her openness to parental influence. This openness to socialization in turn has an impact on the relationship between parenting practices and child development outcomes (Deslandes, 1996, 2008a).

## Integrative model of factors and processes linked to collaborative-school-family relations

Based on the theoretical models described above, and enhanced by the knowledge gained from both the literature review and our own works, a model of the factors and processes associated with school-family collaboration is proposed. A number of observations emerge. For example, we now

know that it is important to consider two modes of parental involvement, at home and at school. Risk factors and personal factors associated with parental involvement and school practices regarding school-family collaboration have been identified. Others were explored in greater depth, while interactions between some factors and processes were highlighted, such as interactions between families' socioeconomic status and ethnicity, parenting practices, and school practices linked to school-family collaboration. The major advances are mainly in the area of environmental factors, as the proposed model will illustrate.

It would be presumptuous to claim an exhaustive list of these factors and processes in the context of this modelling. The model should therefore not be seen as definitive, but as an evolving, in-progress model which, as desired, can provide a groundwork for future research on school-family collaboration. In the diagram, the bidirectionality of the arrows bivocally illustrates interactions between the factors and components of the processes (Deslandes, 2012a, 2019a). On the left are two categories of factors, in this case, those associated with families and schools, and personal factors associated with youth. To the right of the model appear the two groups of processes related to parental involvement in schooling (family environment) and the promotion by teachers of parental involvement in schooling (school environment; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). Depending on their nature, the factors illustrated on the left of the diagram will facilitate or hinder the participation of parents and teachers in the development of school-family collaboration. The reviewed literature revealed direct associations between some of these factors (child's age and grade level, parents' education, previous school experience, and teacher training related to working with parents), parental involvement in schooling, and teachers' promotion of it. For their part, the two groups of processes not only influence each other, but also lead to specific practices of parental involvement and promotion by the school and teachers. When positive and effective, these practices that emanate from the home and school environments lead to informative, collaborative and mutually trusting and respectful school-family relationships. It is on the basis of these conditions that the impact on young people's educational success is optimal.

In order to understand the model, it is relevant to illustrate some examples of facilitating conditions and of barriers (see Figure in Deslandes, 2012a, 2019a). Factors (left) directly and indirectly influence parental involvement in schooling by relating, for example, to the beliefs and ideas that parents have about their role (role construction), their self-efficacy and their perception of the invitations to participate (family processes). Thus, in the specific context of homework, research findings (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2004; Deslandes, Rousseau, Rousseau, Descôteaux & Hardy, 2008) show that parents from non-traditional and low-educated families (family factors) tend to feel less competent to accompany their child (family processes) and, consequently, are less inclined to participate in their child's schooling and collaborate less with the school. This dynamic illustrates challenging conditions unless teachers and the school (school processes) put in place practices aimed at equipping parents and thus increasing their sense of competence, their involvement in school and, consequently, improving school-family relations. In such a dynamic, the school environment then tends to neutralize the deleterious effect of the obstacles present. Moreover, a student's low performance (personal factor associated with the student), which could appear as an obstacle to parental involvement in schooling may constitute a facilitator as an implicit invitation to

parents to supervise the child's work more closely (family processes) or to increase communication with the school and teachers. The latter, through a welcoming atmosphere, adequate communication skills, and consideration of parents' knowledge, skills, and availability (school processes), can represent invitations for parents to participate as well, thus contributing to collaborative school-family relationships. In this vein, research works report that when parents perceive that they are welcome (supportive, courteous school team) and that teachers and principals are interested and cooperative when discussing about the child, parents participate more in activities based either at school or at home, thus strengthening the links between school and family.

Similarly, teachers who have positive prior experiences and specific training in the area of school-family collaboration (school factors) tend to recognize the importance of their professional responsibilities in working with parents and to demonstrate a high sense of competence (school processes) and, as a result, tend to put forward practices that focus on school-family collaboration. However, these facilitators may be neutralized by a lack of support from the principal or by a school culture and organization that leaves little room for working with parents, i.e., school-family collaboration.

This modelling of the factors and processes of school-family collaboration is particularly enlightening with respect to the facilitating and challenging conditions for the development of school-family collaboration. Moreover, it highlights the importance for parents and teachers to be aware of the responsibilities they are charged with in order to move from intention to action with respect to school-family collaboration. In addition, it highlights the role of the school and teachers in this dynamic of interaction for the development of collaborative school-family relationships. We need to ask ourselves what means are currently available to inform parents and teachers in the exercise of their role. In addition to personal, contextual, and persuasive sources of influence, there are a legal framework and documentary sources that can serve as anchors for an ethical framework to guide parents and teachers in understanding and carrying out their respective roles (Deslandes, 2012a, 2019a).

## Family processes and associated benefits

A large number of literature reviews, research syntheses, and meta-analyses in North America have highlighted the influence of the family on the educational success and behaviors of youth (Deslandes, 1996; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2012; Jordan, Orozco & Averett, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). In one study, Deslandes, Potvin and Leclerc (1999) found that family processes are better predictors of youth success than family characteristics. Attention is therefore focused on two processes in particular: the role of the parent educator and school-family relationships, a concept that later, included the community (Deslandes, 2001a, 2010a; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001).

## Role of the parent educator, contextual characteristics and social cognitions

The role of the parent educator includes the attitudes, values and practices of parents in the education of their child and adolescent, while school-family relationships refer to the formal and informal links between school and family (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007a, 2007b). This section focuses on parenting practices and parenting style and their impact on young people, as well as on various contextual characteristics that influence parents in the exercise of their parenting. It then presents certain social cognitions, such as beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and representations of school, which play a role in parents' decisions about whether or not to support their youngster's schooling, in various contexts and with various clientele.

Parenting practices correspond to interventions or activities defined by a specific content (here, parental involvement in schooling is the focus) and by the goals of the socialization process (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parental involvement in schooling is considered both a key factor in improving students' academic performance and an avenue for narrowing the gap in performance between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Research on school success unequivocally shows the influence of developmentally appropriate parenting practices on young people's learning, particularly in reading, mathematics, science, and writing, their motivation to learn, and their behavior. For example, some of the works by Deslandes and her team show the positive effect of parental behaviors such as encouragement, sincere praise, that is emotional support, a presence and openness to exchanges and communication with regard to school and work projects, and direct and punctual help with school work (Deslandes, 2005, 2010a, 2012a, 2013a). These results are in line with Jeynes' (2011) conclusions following three meta-analyses (Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007). Indeed, Jeynes (2011) concluded that parenting practices such as emotional support, parent-youth communication, youth aspirations and parenting style have a greater influence on educational success than any other parenting practice such as the application of rules at home. Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) argue that verbalizing parental aspirations for schooling helps convince youth to stay in school. The family's contribution to literacy is also a consensus in the literature, regardless of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, as shown in a study by Deslandes (2009a), when parents verify, help and supervise homework, youngsters develop more strategies to control their negative emotions, manage their time, eliminate distractions and become self-motivated. In the

context of homework, long-term benefits are also observed: For instance, grade 6 children whose parents were involved when they were in Grade 4 show more self-regulatory strategies (e.g., self-motivation, time management and control of negative emotions; Deslandes & Rousseau, 2008).

The benefits associated with some school-related parenting practices persist across different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, although some nuances need to be taken into account. For example, Jeynes (2003) reports better academic performance among African American students when parents are involved in school committees, but this is not the case for students from other ethnic backgrounds. Other parenting practices, related to school life, also contribute to more positive attitudes toward school, better behavior and attendance in class, and parent-teacher exchanges about school programs and regulations. Parental involvement in school life takes place either through communication and meetings with teachers, such as when handing out report cards, attending school shows or sports activities as an audience, or volunteering in classroom and school activities. By visiting the school or contacting teachers, parents become more aware of the various ways in which they can engage their child in learning activities and monitor their child's progress and difficulties. They are also more likely to develop a constructive relationship with teachers (Deslandes, 2007, 2015).

In addition to the verbalization of parents' educational aspirations, Jeynes (2012) discusses family-initiated practices (voluntary parental involvement) such as shared reading (primary level) and homework checking. The author recommends examining certain more subtle elements such as communication with youth and a parenting style characterized by warmth and supervision. It is exactly along these lines that Quebec research has taken a closer look at the dimensions of parenting style and parental involvement in relation to school success and other indicators of school success over the past 15 years. The following section is a summary of the most salient findings. Each of these results corresponds to a study using a quantitative approach with questionnaires translated, validated and adapted to the Quebec context.

In short, when parents express their affection, encourage autonomy and supervise comings and goings (dimensions of democratic parenting style) and show affective support (dimension associated with parental involvement in schooling), the academic results (Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte & Bertrand, 1997) and aspirations (Deslandes & Potvin, 1998) of adolescents (girls and boys) are better, the level of autonomy (Bouchard, Deslandes & St-Amant, 2001; Deslandes, 2000a; Deslandes et al., 2000) is higher and the time spent on homework is greater (Deslandes et al., 1999b). The more parents supervise the teen's comings and goings, the fewer behavioral problems the teen has at school. In situations of academic or behavioral difficulties, parents intervene more in daily school life and communicate more with teachers (Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes & Royer, 1997).

Deslandes and her colleagues have also conducted research on parenting practices and the gender dimensions of parenting style (Deslandes, 2000a; Deslandes, 2002a, 2002b; Deslandes, Bouchard & St-Amant, 1998; Deslandes & Cloutier, 2000), in the context of homework (Deslandes, 2012b), according to the academic trajectory (Deslandes, 2003b, 2004; Deslandes, Leclerc & Doré-Côté, 2001), according to family structure (Bacon & Deslandes, 2004; Deslandes & Cloutier, 2005;



Deslandes, Jacques, Doré-Côté & Bélanger, 2004). Researchers have also examined the direction of influence in parent-adolescent interactions, i.e., the extent to which parents respond to greater autonomy among adolescents (Deslandes, 2000b). Finally, they investigated adolescents' interest in supporting parental involvement in schooling (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002).

In summary, based on our own works, it appears that mothers are more sensitive and warm-hearted (engagement) and they participate more in schooling than fathers. Fathers are more likely to encourage the adolescents' psychological autonomy, especially girls. In general, when fathers go to school, it is more in connection with the boys that they do so. Girls appear to be particularly sensitive to family influence when it comes to school achievement, while boys are more sensitive when it comes to work orientation (effort and perseverance). The parents' socialization practices of regular stream students and of traditional families with respect to academic success are generally superior to those of special education students' parents and of non-traditional families. They also change more over time. Adolescents living in matricentric single-parent families perform better academically than those in patricentric single-parent families. When students are 15 to 16 years old, parents appear to be more responsive to their development than they appear to contribute to it, except for identity, where there is reciprocity in parent-adolescent transactions. Finally, adolescents are more receptive to some parental involvement activities than others. It is important to take their perceptions into account when implementing collaborative activities between school and family. As for the context of homework, fathers of elementary school students, compared to mothers who participated in the studies, seemed to adopt a more authoritarian style, which involved increased supervision, such as sitting with the child and ensuring that homework was done well, and strict strategies, such as repeating and correcting mistakes. Results also point to a more positive perception of the utility of homework for fathers than for mothers (Deslandes, 2012b).

## Contextual characteristics

The **contextual characteristics** that influence parental involvement are discussed from a variety of perspectives. In terms of **parental and family characteristics**, the studies reviewed show that there is a link between parental involvement in schooling and family characteristics such as income, parental education, family structure, number of children and employment status. For example, two-parent families with a rather high level of education participate more in schooling at home and at school than single-parent families with low level of education. Parents with few children are more involved in schooling at home, but family size does not seem to affect their involvement at school. Parents who work outside the home are less involved in school, but their involvement at home is not diminished. In general, research tends to show that mothers are more interested in school work and have more communication with the school than fathers (Deslandes, 2003b). The family characteristics that most influence parental involvement are the social and psychological resources available to parents, their confidence in their own ability to help their child learn, their perception of their child's academic abilities and aspirations, their beliefs about their role as educators, their attitudes towards school, and the invitations to participate on the part of the school and the child (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001).



**Youth-related characteristics** also influence parental involvement in schooling. The child's gender, age, personality, social skills and school history also seem to influence parental involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996, 1993, cited in Deslandes, 2001a; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001). For example, parents would tend to be more supportive of a child experiencing difficulties in school for the first time. In addition, some authors (e.g., Deslandes, 2003b; Epstein, 2019) have observed a relationship between age and parental involvement: the further along a young person's educational trajectory, the less parental involvement. In Quebec, Deslandes and Cloutier's (2000) study revealed that, regardless of the adolescent's gender, mothers participate in schooling in the same way. Regarding boys, however, mothers communicate more frequently with teachers. Fathers attend more parent meetings at school, and they get more involved in discussions about current events and future plans with boys than with girls. It can therefore be assumed that fathers are more involved with boys than with girls, at least according to the perception of adolescents who participated in our studies (Deslandes, 2012b).

In terms of **educator and school characteristics and practices**, research shows that teachers who have received training in school, family and community collaboration are more likely to promote parental involvement. In their investigation, Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that teachers' strategies to promote parental involvement and SFC collaborative programs were the variables that best predicted parental involvement. School practices thus influence family practices. Indeed, parents are more involved in schooling at home and at school when they perceive that the school wants and encourages their collaboration. It seems that in 2015 (Deslandes, Barma & Morin, 2015), as in 2001 (Deslandes, 2001a, Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001), some school staff members were still more in favour of traditional parental involvement: fundraising campaigns, accompaniment on field trips, homework supervision, etc. (Deslandes, 2001a, Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001). This attitude can be explained by their conviction that parents do not want to get involved in their youngsters' schooling or that they do not have enough training for participation in decision-making in the school environment. Some educators fear that parents will question their competence, attack or criticize them, or blame them for their child's problems. As a result, some perceive parental presence as a threat to their professional autonomy and consequently, they seek to create professional boundaries between themselves and the parents. Others perceive it as an addition to their work, as they do not see cooperation with parents as necessary or as an integral part of their professional role. In fact, many teachers and principals still report that they do not know how to initiate collaboration with the parents (see also Deslandes, Barma & Morin, 2015).

The **characteristics of the community** in which the family lives can influence parental involvement. The level of cohesion, the type of social organization and the social network are all elements that influence both the values and practices of parents and have an impact on their involvement in their child's school life. Thus, according to some authors, parents from less safe environments are more likely to teach defensive strategies in relation to the environment to protect their child from potential dangers, while parents from safer environments will develop more their child's ability to use the resources available in the environment. In this context, it is easy to conceive the difference between the attitudes that parents and their children will adopt towards school depending on whether they live in one environment or the other (Deslandes, 2001a).

The **characteristics of the school** must also be considered. According to Leithwood (2009), parents are less involved in large schools and public schools compared to small schools and private schools. Parental involvement is stimulated by a school environment that contributes to a "sense of community" as well as a sense of inclusion for all parents. As we saw in our document on *School-Community Relations* (Volume 2), the relationship between the school and the community, as well as between the school and the parents, is not without any challenges. Although Quebec's education reform has assigned political and community responsibility to the school principal, openness to the community is not necessarily a spontaneous concern for the school. According to some authors, it is up to the school and its members to create this openness by taking initiatives. On the part of the school, establishing links with the community requires, above all, knowledge of existing organizations, the projection in the community of a positive image of the school and a firm desire to share its educational mission with the local environment. In addition, the school must seek to put into place an effective communication network between the organizations involved in a common project.

**In summary**, a number of research studies and literature reviews have identified characteristics that influence the level of parental involvement, including parental and family characteristics (education, family structure, ethnicity), children's characteristics (age, academic performance, responsiveness or openness to family influence), and teacher and school characteristics and practices (values, professional training; Deslandes, 2001a; Deslandes & Cloutier, 2000, 2002, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). **The diversity of children and their families** is one of the most important contemporary challenges facing educators in the education field. Immigrant and disadvantaged parents and some *new families* face a greater number of challenges in terms of parental involvement in schooling and, consequently, school-family collaboration (Deslandes, 2006a; Deslandes et al., 2004). These challenges or obstacles may be associated with non-flexible work schedules, a lack of resources, time and energy, transportation problems and stress related to life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, to which language and cultural barriers are sometimes added. Moreover, parents from disadvantaged families are more likely to have a low level of education, to have a poor understanding of the school system and to have had negative school experiences (Changkakoti & Akkari, 2008; Deslandes, 2006a; Deniger, Anne, Dubé & Goulet, 2009; Larivée, 2011b). Yet, in an earlier study by Deslandes and Rivard (2011a), parents reported that they needed teachers' help in identifying their children's strengths and challenges. However, in an approach based on identifying ways to meet the needs expressed by parents, educators mentioned doubts about the parents' willingness or desire from disadvantaged backgrounds to receive more information and to become more involved (Deslandes & Rivard, 2011b). It therefore seems that there is **no common vision of parents' needs, at least in some settings**.

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, Deslandes (2013a) argues that a multitude of social cognitions must be considered when parents decide whether or not to support their children in their school career. They may correspond to their representations, expectations, perceptions and beliefs. Here are a few examples of reviews of the literature and studies, mainly in Quebec, conducted on these themes over the years:

**Representations of the school.** Many parents from disadvantaged backgrounds have an instrumental view of school and hope that it will enable their children to enjoy social mobility and a better quality of life than they do. They expect the school to help their child to learn the norms of society, and to develop the knowledge and autonomy required to become responsible citizens. Faced with their young people's academic difficulties, which are more prevalent in working-class environments, parents adopt one of two attitudes: either a resigned attitude in reaction to academic failure, or expectations towards teachers to find ways to promote their child's success and optimal development (Jaeggi, Osiek & Favre, 2003). These parents tend to focus on learning specific skills rather than seeing learning as a whole (Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Given this fragmented view of learning processes, these same parents may adopt inflexible and overly demanding support strategies, or focus on using reinforcement rather than on active and ongoing involvement (Thin, 1998, cited in Deslandes, 2013a).

As for immigrant families, in addition to the difficulties already mentioned, there are language difficulties and a lack of knowledge of the school system in which their child/teenager is evolving (Kanouté & Lafortune, 2011; Vatz Laaroussi et al., 2005; Vatz Laaroussi, Rachédi & Kanouté, 2008). As a consequence, many of them remain in disadvantaged neighborhoods where school demobilization is higher. The low frequency of contact between parents and teachers may therefore reflect social and cultural differences, which often lead to a discontinuity between family culture and school culture (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). It is also possible that their representations of the school and of the teachers' role as well as their expectations regarding teachers may differ from that of the dominant culture. For example, their respect for the teacher as an authority figure could be interpreted as passive parental involvement. These differences may create areas of tension with teachers. For their part, Kanouté and Lafortune (2011) and other authors (e.g., Vatz Laaroussi et al., 2005) consider that the issues of academic success for students of immigrant origin are similar to those for all students, while incorporating a specificity related to their minority situation or to some challenges concerning, for example, knowledge of the school system or mastery of the language of instruction. Deslandes (2013b) adds, however, that **it is important to specify that ethnic groups and Quebecers of French Canadian origin do not form homogeneous parent groups. Beware of making abusive generalizations.**

In the context of special education, a study conducted by Beauregard (2006) looked at parents' and elementary school teachers' representations of their roles in the integration of dysphasic students into regular classrooms. The author differentiates the role being expected, played and desired. The results showed that the participants' representations of their role are based on their representations of the child, school integration, the objectives pursued by school integration, and the resulting expectations. These representations guide their practices. Although the teachers were satisfied of their relationship with the parents, the parents' observations appear to be rather mixed. Parents see themselves as the first responders to their child's needs and want to be consulted when a decision is made about their child. For them, a two-way communication is essential, whereas for teachers, the relational dimension is the most important aspect. The latter one is discussed under the umbrella of information, exchange and presentation of pedagogical tools. For teachers, it is

important to clearly define the roles of each person, thus allowing the development of a collaboration characterized by listening and respect.

**Parents' and teachers' expectations of one another.** In the qualitative study by Deslandes and Morin (2002), parents of primary school students said that they expect greater availability from teachers, as they consider that their contacts are not sufficient for effective communication, thus creating tensions in their relationship with the school. They expect more guidance in accompanying their child with homework. As for the teachers participating in the study, they expect parents to supervise homework and they want parents to show more trust in them. They deplore the fact that values have changed and feel that youngsters are too spoiled. The parents' statements as a whole appear more positive than those of the teachers. It seems that teachers are taking a blaming position towards families for not supporting school work at home. They fear conflict and they have a defensive attitude. On the one hand, they feel that parents have too much power, but at the same time, they request their trust. How can these tensions and misunderstandings between school and families be reduced? The authors point out that collaboration depends on a convergence of viewpoints and on the roles and responsibilities that each one is willing to assume.

Bergeron and Deslandes (2011) also examined primary parents' **expectations** regarding the group information meeting at the beginning of the school year in terms of welcome, information and exchanges, as well as their perceptions of the development of a trust relationship with their child's teacher. The authors used the themes proposed by Christenson and Sheridan (2001): approach, attitudes, atmosphere and actions. According to the parents, the purpose of the information meeting is to establish a first contact with the teacher, anticipate the yearly planning agenda, learn about the parent's role in accompanying their child, build the parent's trust, learn how the classroom and the school function, and gather information. The participants wanted to have (and they had) a question period during the information meeting. However, there were no collective discussions or exchanges during this meeting, which did not allow for the identification of actions aimed at developing the sharing of responsibilities. As for expectations in terms of attitudes, it seemed important for the teacher to show that the child is at the heart of his/her preoccupations and that he/she shows passion for the profession. In terms of creating trust, it is the teacher's attitude rather than the content of the information that would be decisive.

**Perceptions.** In a qualitative study with parents, teachers, and principals, Larivée (2011a) examined participants' perceptions of the impact of Epstein's typology of types of parental involvement on school performance. Perception was measured in terms of good, average, poor, no-response. The same was applied to the types of parental involvement. The level of parental involvement related to school-family communication and learning at home was the highest. However, parents say they are less involved in committees and activities related to the community, which is quite logical. The mentioned challenges or obstacles are similar to those identified in previous studies by Deslandes and her colleagues (Deslandes, 2001 a, c, 2006a, Deslandes & Bertrand, 2004; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin & Leclerc, 1999). The fact that all types of parental involvement were considered by the majority of interviewed parents and teachers to be good or moderately good in

promoting academic success runs counter to what Epstein repeatedly explained and obtained in her studies (see Epstein et al., 2009, 2019).

A review of the literature by Larivée, Kalubi and Terrisse (2006) highlighted perceptions of barriers specific to the context of inclusion, such as the importance of the accuracy of the information provided and the sense of diplomacy in delivering the information as well as a reminder of the unequal relationship that persists. Perceptions of the success factors of this collaborative work between parents and professionals are similar to those that were repeatedly mentioned, such as the parents' constant involvement, positive attitudes and good communication between the actors involved in the process.

Again in the context of special education, Letscher (2012) conducted a study with deaf people in relation to their perceptions of barriers and facilitators related to social participation in education and in work (see also Letscher, Deslandes & Parent, 2015). At the level of the personal microenvironment, the family structure, the relationship with hearing parents, the defensive, protective or distant styles, and the parenting practices appeared to have an influence on the development of the individual's social participation. With respect to the community mesoenvironment, Letscher identified factors specific to principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, interpreters, classmates, employers, co-workers, clients, friends, and neighbors.

In the context of health education, Rivard and Deslandes (2014) examined educators' and students' perceptions of health in disadvantaged environments. Qualitative research using focus groups revealed that participating students associated health with lifestyle, especially physical activity and nutrition. Older students also showed a concern about the safety aspect of organizing games during recess. Educators discussed safety further in terms of supervision during recess to reduce conflict and fighting. The authors stressed the importance of developing a shared vision of health among students and educators in the pursuit of collaborative and complementary health education in low socioeconomic milieus.

**Beliefs.** The role of parents' **beliefs and perceptions** about their reasons for becoming involved was examined using the model of the parent involvement process developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). Two studies were conducted, one with parents of primary school students and the other with parents of secondary school students (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2004, 2005). Parental involvement in schooling was measured in two ways: participation at home and participation at school. With regard to the primary school students' parental involvement at home, the results indicate that, regardless of family structure and size and the child's level of education, parents are involved primarily on the basis of their sense of competence or efficacy. At the secondary level, parents become more involved at home if they perceive invitations to participate from the teenager. For example, a teenager who gives his/her parent the school notices and messages, asks for ideas or shows him/her something he/she has learned in class, encourages discussion and lets the parent know that his/her involvement is desired. With respect to parental involvement in school at both the elementary and secondary levels, regardless of the parent's education, family structure, and the student's grade level, the more the parent perceives invitations from teachers and the more he/she

perceives school involvement as one of his/her parental responsibilities (parental role construction), the more the parent is involved in schooling (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2004, 2005). Low socioeconomic status is often associated with a low sense of parental competence/efficacy. Added to this are elements of the family life context that are likely to constitute challenges, especially with respect to parental involvement in school, such as busy and rigid work schedules, which result in less availability and less energy on the part of parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007).

A third study, also based on the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model, compared France and Quebec in identifying factors predicting parental involvement in homework at the high school level (Bardou, Oubrayrie-Roussel, Safont-Mottay, Lescarret, Deslandes & Rousseau, 2010). Individual, sociodemographic and psychological variables were selected in relation to parental beliefs about homework. Exactly 230 French parents and 344 Quebec parents completed an identical questionnaire. The main results obtained by regression analysis reveal the importance of parental role construction and parental efficacy in predicting parental involvement in homework in France and in Quebec.

In the context of health education, Rivard and Deslandes (2013) also used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model. They attempted to describe how educators and parents become involved in health-related issues in a disadvantaged school in Quebec. The interview protocol was based on Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker and Ice's (2010), revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process and more specifically, on the mechanisms of influence, modelling, reinforcement, teaching and encouragement. The findings indicate that the educators' and the parents' actions generally correspond to modelling and encouragement, with a focus on physical activity and nutrition. Educators stress the importance of basing their health actions on the school project activities, while parents feel that their voluntary participation in the various health-related activities organized at school greatly helps them in their efforts to support their child. The results highlight the parents' undeniable contribution to children's health in today's education systems. In their conclusion, the authors highlighted the importance of two difficult denominators: (1) a shared vision of health; and (2) coherent actions for health education in a disadvantaged environment.

## School-family relations in elementary and secondary schools

Like in the Harvard Family Research Project (2007a, b), Deslandes (2010a, 2011a) defines school-family relationships as the formal and informal links between school and parents. These relationships can take the form of, for example, communication with teachers, parent-teacher meetings, assistance in the classroom and school, and participation in committees, activities, and social events at school or on outings. In fact, these examples correspond to the types of parental involvement in the typology proposed by Epstein (1987, 1995, 2011, 2019). It is now well known that parents who get involved early in their child's schooling tend to do so throughout the child's school career. Moreover, the benefits are observed over the long term, whether in terms of academic performance and perseverance, improved literacy and mathematical skills, engagement and work habits of the youngsters, and parent-youth exchanges on school programs and regulations (Barnard, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002, 2004, 2005; Simon, 2004). These



benefits persist across different socioeconomic and multiethnic groups, although some nuances need to be taken into account. For example, with respect to the beneficial effects of parental volunteering at school, Hill (2001) notes a positive impact on the behavior of primary school students, which is much higher in disadvantaged areas than in middle class environments (Deslandes, 2013a). The literature reports nuances according to the education of parents and ethnic groups in high school. As an illustration, Hill et al. (2004) observe that, when it comes to parental participation in decision-making committees, adolescents from highly educated parents show a slight improvement in behavior, while those from less educated parents show higher educational aspirations without having necessarily better academic performance (Deslandes, 2010a, 2013a).



## Role of the school in school-family relations

The next section discusses what can and should be done by the school to foster collaborative school-family relationships.

### Setting up activities

Among the most effective elements in fostering positive school-family relationships are teachers' strategies to promote parental involvement and school-family collaborative programs (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Simon, 2004; Sheldon, 2019). Indeed, a large body of scientific literature has emphasized the importance of developing a comprehensive program of collaborative activities adapted to the needs identified by each school and aimed at reaching as many families as possible, no matter how diverse they may be. School practices therefore influence family practices. Parents are more involved at home and at school when they perceive that the latter promotes their collaboration (Deslandes, 2001a, 2007, 2010a). Sheldon (2019) argues that research conducted over almost 25 years shows that school practices and strategies for involving families make a difference in whether, who, and how families participate. Similarly, Perrenoud (1999) says that, as professionals, it is up to teachers to take responsibility for developing and maintaining dialogue between schools and families. Most families need help to be involved in schooling more productively, especially during transitions between preschool and elementary school and between elementary and secondary school (Epstein, 2019; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Parental involvement promotes shared responsibility and even school-family collaboration (Deslandes, 2012a; 2015). The fact that parents share the school's values and reinforce school activities promotes the development of collaboration and usually translates into improved academic performance. In the same vein, Jeynes (2012) indicates that when parents and teachers work together, i.e., when there is collaboration, the results are more beneficial than when they work in parallel, as was previously the case in so-called traditional schools. It is therefore up to the school to organize collaborative activities that aim to reach as many families as possible, based on the needs of students and those expressed by families (Epstein, 2011, 2019; Henderson et al., 2007; Simon, 2004). When schools introduce multifaceted activity programs to encourage family involvement, families respond by becoming more involved. In doing so, the school sends consistent messages to all families that their participation is both desired and necessary to support youth as learners (Christenson, 2003; Deslandes, 2010a; Epstein, 2011, 2019).

Leithwood (2009) identified three categories of factors that can cause tensions in school-family relationships: (1) the dispositions regarding parental involvement; (2) the nature of communication between the school and parents; and (3) both linguistic and cultural differences between parents and the school team. Parents report frustration when the school does not appear to be listening to their concerns and instead acts as a closed system. School-parent communication can be a major source of tension and frustration for parents and school staff. These can be attributed to inconsistent frequency, poor timing, and ineffective communication initiatives. Short meeting periods, a schedule

of school-family meetings that is difficult to reconcile with family schedules, one-way communication, and expectations of personal invitations instead of general invitations are just some of the tensions identified by parents. Some teachers complained about the lack of useful feedback from parents. When parents come from different backgrounds than school staff, they often have very different perspectives on teaching and learning processes and on the appropriate levels and types of involvement in their children's education. For example, parents from certain cultures and with negative school backgrounds or experiences might avoid school events that require them to talk to authority figures. It is thus imperative to take into consideration parents' expectations for their children's education.

**But why are we talking about relationships in education?** For Clarke, Sheridan and Woods (2010), the terms involvement and participation of families in young people's learning refer to actions/events, while the expressions relationships/relations reflect a dynamic and interpersonal perspective. According to these authors, the terms collaboration and partnership refer to action verbs for interacting with families, and school-family relationships represent personal and emotional qualities associated with these actions. Thus, supportive and interpersonal relationships between families and teachers appear to be the breeding ground for collaborative relationships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Clarke et al., 2010). The authors point out that the collaboration or partnership in question is essentially a matter of **relationships**. From the perspective of collaborative relationships, Christenson and Sheridan (2001) recommend focusing on four aspects: (1) An Approach that values the roles of key players, (2) Positive Attitudes towards each other, (3) A Welcoming and Respectful Atmosphere, and (4) Actions that are actualized through facilitating activities (Deslandes, 2010b). We are therefore talking here about knowing **how to be** before arriving at actions.

To be collaborative, these relationships must be based on positive attitudes that require mutual respect, shared leadership, and two-way communication (Christenson, 2003; Christenson et al., 1992, cited in Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes, 1999, 2001c, 2006a). Constructive attitudes that emphasize interpersonal relationships open the door to questions such as: "How can we work together to better promote student achievement?" Collaboration is based on principles of equality (willingness to listen, respect, and learn from each other) and parity (sharing knowledge, skills, and ideas to foster relationships and outcomes with youth). Constructive attitudes occur when parents, teachers, and other community members (1) listen to each other's points of view; (2) see differences as strengths; (3) focus on their mutual interest, i.e., student success and development; and (4) share information to co-construct better understanding and more effective interventions; (5) respect each other's skills and knowledge by inviting them to express their ideas and opinions; (6) plan and make decisions together to meet each other's needs; (7) convey consistent messages about the importance of school work and expected behaviors; (8) demonstrate a willingness/desire to resolve conflict; (9) avoid blaming each other and looking for blame; and (10) commit to sharing successes and accomplishments (Christenson, 2003). Other authors have highlighted trust as a vital component in partnership (Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette & Hamby, 1992, cited in Deslandes, 1996). These collaborative relationships also need to address the information, support, and training needs of families (Terrisse, Larivée, Larose, & Bédard, 2008), as well as their socioeconomic and cultural differences, i.e., their diversity (Christenson, 2003; Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2013a; Grant & Ray,

2013; Henderson et al. 2007; Kanouté & Lafortune, 2011; McAndrew, Milot and Triki-Yamani, 2010) When these relationships are structured in a positive and constructive manner, they are beneficial for youth, parents and teachers (Clarke et al., 2010). The quality of interactions between schools and families is more related to improvements in youth learning and behavior than to the quantity of contacts between parents and teachers (Deslandes, 2006a, 2012a).

**Sharp focus on interpersonal relationships.** Over the years, a research strand has developed around the theme of interpersonal relationships, that is, interactions between the child/adolescent and the parent, between the child/adolescent and the teacher, between the teacher and the parent, and between the child and the teacher (Deslandes, 2014). Parent-youth and parent-teacher relationships receive particular attention in the current text. In this regard, Clarke et al. (2010) point out that school learning takes place in a context of relationships.

**Parent-youth relationships.** Studies have highlighted the importance of parent-youth relationships in predicting educational success and perseverance (Deslandes, 2013b). Studies show that positive mother-child relationships are associated with positive student-teacher and school-family relationships at the kindergarten level (Deslandes, 2013a, 2013b; Deslandes & Jacques, 2003, 2004). The relevant studies refer to the family microsystem as presented in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model or to the family sphere and the internal part of the overlapping spheres of influence shared influence model (Epstein, 1995, 2011). Thus, young people who describe parenting behaviors characterized by warmth, sensitivity, receptiveness and that contribute to the development of autonomy while providing appropriate teaching and supervision develop their full potential and become more involved in their schooling than their peers. For example, in a study conducted at the kindergarten level, Deslandes and Jacques (2003, 2004) found that when mothers report positive interactions with their child, the child is more likely to take ownership of his/her role as a student by respecting the teacher's authority and the rules of the classroom, interacting appropriately with peers, and showing initiative. At the secondary level, positive parent-youth relationships are also characterized by parental involvement in schooling during which parents show their emotional support (encouragement, sincere compliments, availability), interact on a daily basis (questions about the school, results, and school work), and discuss future plans, course selection, and help with time planning and management (Deslandes, 1996, 2005). These parent-adolescent relationships are then associated with better academic performance, higher educational aspirations, greater autonomy and a greater sense of responsibility (Deslandes, 1996, 2007, 2010a). These observations are significant regardless of the socioeconomic status of the family and the educational level of the youth.

**Teacher-parent relationships.** This is the school-family mesosystem. Positive parent-child and teacher-student relationships are often associated with positive teacher-parent relationships. Again according to Deslandes and Jacques' (2003, 2004) study, it seems that positive parent-child relationships are related to more communication with the teacher about parental and family experiences, greater knowledge of the teacher's educational practices, and a positive and particularly more proximal relationship with the teacher. In the study, there was a positive relationship between the number of opportunities for parent-teacher meetings and exchanges and the child's

comfort level with the teacher. However, parents whose children had behavior problems reported more meetings to discuss the child's difficulties and progress. This is so at the secondary level. It is not surprising that parents and teachers are in greater contact when the youngster is experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties (Deslandes, 1996).

Furthermore, for teacher-parent relationships to be positive and collaborative, they must be child-centered and develop in the presence of shared responsibility, mutual trust and open communication between partners (Deslandes, 1996, 2013b). These relationships are characterized by constructive communication and dialogue, trust, and a shared commitment to maintain these relationships to support the child (Clarke et al., 2010). Trust in teacher-parent relationships is also worthy of attention, as it is seen as the first step in developing collaborative relationships between schools and families. In studies conducted with parents and teachers of both regular and special education students (Deslandes, Fournier & Rousseau, 2005; Deslandes, Rousseau & Fournier, 2007), the results revealed that parents trust teachers more than vice versa to promote learning and youth development. Parents who perceive their relationship with their teen's teacher as positive showed greater confidence in the teacher. According to their comments, this trust can be improved primarily by the quality of the relationship that the teachers develop with the teenagers, then through the communication that they establish with them, by their professional skills (e.g., liking the work, mastering the content) and their personal skills (e.g., being frank and honest, listening to the teenager). In other words, parents expect the teacher to know their youngster on a personal basis, to pay attention to him/her, to respect and encourage him/her, and to give help in developing interest in learning (Deslandes, 2013b). It is therefore through a caring, warm and supportive approach on the teacher's part and the relationship established with the child and adolescent that the teacher-parent trust develops (Deslandes, 2006a). Moreover, this trust in one another is developed through repeated contacts such as meetings, face-to-face interviews, exchanges, telephone conversations, written comments, involvement in educational, social or other activities (Deslandes, 2004, 2006a, 2015).

## Training of educators in collaborative school-family relations

Many teachers and principals admit that they do not know how to work with parents and how to begin working with families and the community (Deslandes, 2001a). In order to identify the needs of pre-service teachers in this area, a study was conducted with 229 students enrolled in the fourth year of the Bachelor Degree of Education (preschool-primary, secondary and special education) program offered by our own institution. The objective was to identify the participants' level of knowledge and their self-efficacy with regard to SFC collaboration. The measurement instrument used was an adaptation of the questionnaire by Morris et al. (1996), which consists of 16 statements. Examples of statements include: "How comfortable are you with your ability to conduct effective interviews with parents?" "To what extent are you aware of the role of the community in promoting and supporting the school's mission?". In order to dwell more deeply into the issue at hand, two open-ended questions were added. The majority of students reported a lack of information and a low self-efficacy in facilitating parent-teacher meetings and workshops for parents. They also reported a lack of information on effective strategies to engage parents and community members, the influence of demographics on parental involvement, and the role of the community in promoting and supporting the school. This finding was more pronounced among pre-service secondary school teachers (Deslandes, Rousseau & Royer, 2002).

The identification of these gaps in the training of pre-service teachers led to a review of the literature to identify relevant models for pre-service and in-service training on school, family and community collaboration. Inspired by two models, that of Chavkin and Williams (1988) and that of Shartrand, Weiss, Kerider and Lopez (1997), Deslandes (see 2001b) then participated in the development of a basic course offered in the common core of mandatory pre-service teacher education courses at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR). The program had four sections: personal, contextual, conceptual and practical. The training was given for the first time in the winter of 2004. An evaluation of the training was then conducted (Deslandes, Fournier & Morin, 2006). The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the impact of the training on pre-service teachers' levels of knowledge and comfort in working with families and the community, on their personal attitudes and beliefs about engaging families and the community in general, and on specific engagement strategies. Participants felt that they have more knowledge and feel more comfortable in conducting meetings with parents and in engaging them. They developed knowledge about the benefits and challenges associated with family and community, available community resources, and the influence of demographics on parental involvement. They reported an increased awareness of the importance of families as partners and the strengths of families that can help children improve their chances of success. They are aware of the importance of specific activities. The results generally support the effectiveness of the training. The recommendations emphasize the need to test the long-term effects of practices to promote parental and community engagement on the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of future teachers. Although Larivée and Garnier (2014) deplore the fact that none of the courses offered at the Université de Montréal's Bachelor Degree in Education in preschool and primary teaching (BÉPEP) program deals strictly with this topic, the fact remains that UQTR not only continues to offer it at the undergraduate level, it also added a relevant graduate course four years ago. The same is true regarding the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC).

Moreover, as with the work of Kanouté and colleagues (e.g., Kanouté & Llevot Calbert, 2008), we see the need for a greater emphasis on cultural diversity in teacher education.

For their part, Letscher, Deslandes and Parent (2009) attempted to identify the perceptions of 4<sup>th</sup> year pre-service teachers regarding the space given to SFC collaboration in the schools where they did their special education practicum. Findings show that SFC collaboration is an ideal to be reached for the majority of participants. An analysis of the data collected through a survey with these pre-service teachers shows that the school practitioners with whom they worked did not give the same importance to SFC collaboration and that, often, this collaboration seemed less important to them in schools with a large number of students with special needs and in low socioeconomic environments. Pre-service teachers say that they will be very sensitive with the implementation of strong SFC collaboration in their future schools. They wish to develop good attitudes towards the practice of SFC collaboration once they have a teaching job.

In the same vein, Tremblay, Dumoulin, Gagnon, and Giroux (2015) examined the SFC projects of twenty-five teaching interns in at-risk settings. The analysis of these projects based on Epstein's (2011) typology highlights two main types of collaboration, namely communication and volunteer work. Collaboration with the community is present in a few of the interns' projects, while there is no activity related to parents' decision-making regarding school life. The authors argue that pre-service training should make future teachers aware of the relevance of the six types of SFC, including parents' knowledge of their parental role and ways to encourage their support at home.



## Evaluation of school-family-community partnerships

The intervention approach in a SFC partnership program as proposed by Epstein et al. (2002, 2009, 2019) includes the following steps: (1) creating a school-family-community collaboration Action Group, with a member on the school board; (2) obtaining formal support from the school principal and a self-sustaining budget to organize activities; (3) providing training on school-family-community collaboration to members of the group; (4) identifying starting points and current strengths and weaknesses (see Baril & Deslandes, 2002; Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b; Deslandes, Bastien, Lemieux, & Fournier, 2006); (5) develop a three-year plan; (6) write a detailed annual plan; (7) recruit teachers, parents, students, and community groups to assist the Action Group; (8) evaluate both program implementation and results annually and take corrective action as soon as possible, if necessary; and (9) organize annual celebrations and provide a status report to all participants (Deslandes, 2001a).

For its part, the approach to carry out the evaluation adopts the following cyclical methodological structure: (1) starting point; (2) needs assessment; (3) action plan; (4) action and means; (5) evaluation; and (6) revised action. A period of reflection is inserted between each of the stages (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2010b; Deslandes et al., 2006). Critical elements of successful programming and evaluation include leadership, teamwork, planning, etc. (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2010b; Deslandes et al., 2006). In the written plan, schools set clear goals for student learning and behavior. The action plan identifies how families and community partners will be mobilized to help students achieve these goals. A good plan includes objectives, specific involvement activities, types of involvement, actions required, and the people responsible for implementing the activities (**see the grids based on Epstein's works and translated into French in the appendices, Deslandes, Bastien, Lemieux, & Fournier, 2006**).

Each school must determine whether the activities are in the form of a specific event, ongoing communication, a series of meetings or workshops, or other innovative strategies that may foster parent involvement at school or at home. New activities may be introduced or existing activities may be modified. Epstein et al. (2019) advocate a goal-oriented approach that focuses on objectives such as (1) improving academic achievement in reading, writing, science, mathematics, social studies, or other subjects; (2) improving school attendance; (3) promoting positive student behaviors and engagement in school; (4) ensuring successful transitions to secondary school, for example; (5) providing proactive counselling for career or postsecondary education plans (p. (e.g., guidance school); (6) enhance students' physical and mental well-being (e.g., health education); (7) improve the welcoming environment; or (8) add a productive partnership with a community-based organization. These goals should be linked to the school improvement plan. Partnership programs differ from school to school. Schools must adapt their practices to the school's goals, the needs and interests of families, and the age and level of their students (Epstein et al., 2019).

Schools improve the quality of program implementation by using several technologies, such as portals and other new communication channels. Evaluation involves assessing the quality and success of each activity after its implementation and assessing the quality of the program as a whole at the end of each school year. At the school level, evaluation is intended to be broader and



encompasses the quality of teamwork, support from the principal, shared leadership, stakeholder involvement, awareness of families and community partners, student outcomes, etc. The evaluation is also intended to be more comprehensive and to include the quality of teamwork, principal support, shared leadership, stakeholder involvement, awareness of families and community partners, student outcomes, etc. (Deslandes, 2006b; Epstein, 2019).

Epstein (2019) talks of incremental progress in improving partnership programs. The author points out that not all students immediately improve their attitudes or performance as a result of family involvement. Student learning begins with a rigorous curriculum, engaging and appropriate instructional strategies, student motivation to learn, and the work that students do. However, some authors (e.g., Epstein et al., 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Sheldon, 2003, 2007) mention that certain outcomes related to family and community involvement are more easily observed in the short term, such as improved attendance and behavior; other outcomes (performance) take longer. The authors believe that if more and more families are engaged, more students will hear messages of support for education at school as well as at home and, over time, more students will be motivated to do their best at school.

Evaluation remains a challenge. The success of a program depends on the quality of its evaluation, which is determined by the ways in which outcomes will be observed, documented, measured, or monitored over time (Sheldon, 2009). The created Action Group should choose more than one way to evaluate: a) the quality of partnership activities, b) the responses and participation rate of targeted participants, and c) the achievement of each of the objectives. Evaluation strategies range from simply recording the number of participants in an activity or the number of families who received information, to more complex procedures such as administering questionnaires and conducting interviews or focus groups. It is important to evaluate the implementation process and the impacts of the program (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). Throughout this process, the importance of the school principal leadership is reiterated over and over again (Epstein, 2019; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004).

To what extent is it possible to isolate the effects of family and community involvement on students, parents, teachers from the combined and associated effects of efforts to improve the school? These studies require more complex and sophisticated measures and research methods. Epstein and Sheldon (2019) recommend specific research designs, adequate samples, and longitudinal measures with inputs and outputs. For example, using a theory of change or logic model (Westmoreland, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2009), the authors propose to illustrate the trajectory of influence of the components of a partnership program and their interconnections, while indicating how they are expected to produce short- and medium-term outcomes. If the actions within the six types of activities are linked to students' learning and developmental goals and if the planned activities are well implemented, then more families and community partners will engage with students in productive ways (Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). A word of caution! Educators need to build on the knowledge, tools, and strategies that have already been proven. No more improvisations, no more starting from scratch, and no more questions such as "Do you think this activity is effective?". According to Sheldon (2009), by evaluating their partnership programs, schools

will be able to reach more families, which will encourage the involvement of more family members in their children's schooling and help more students attend school on a regular basis. Epstein and Sheldon (2019) underline that evaluation is for improvement, not judgment, as there are no "good" or "bad" SFC partnership programs.

## Initiatives focused on Epstein's works and carried out in Quebec

### First initiative

Baril and Deslandes conducted a needs assessment study in 2002 as a first step in developing an action plan for the implementation of a SFC partnership program. The goal was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the activities then offered in the school. For his approach, based on Epstein's typology, Baril, a high school principal, used questionnaires for students, parents and staff developed by Epstein, Connors and Salinas, 1993, cited in Deslandes, 1996). These were translated into French by a linguistics expert and validated by the school's participation committee, and then presented to the coordination table involving teachers, facilitators, etc. Students, their parents, and school team members were asked to indicate which activities should be continued and which ones should be developed or improved. There was a convergence between parents and staff members on successful situations and those requiring improvement. Type 4 on school work at home is the one for which special attention was requested by all three categories of actors. Information, consultation, training and perception in relation to homework are among the recurring keywords. Type 1 suggests attention associated with information on problems related to adolescence. This category involves a better knowledge of families and a different perception that adolescents may have of the role that their parents can play at this time in their lives. Type 3 questions the school's openness to invitations to parents as volunteers in educational activities and the adolescents' perception of their parents' presence at these activities. Type 2 on communication from school to family and from family to school receives a very high level of satisfaction. This study makes an original contribution to the development of measuring instruments that still can be used in 2018. It goes without saying that each questionnaire will have to be adapted to each context, each school (Baril & Deslandes, 2002).

### Second Initiative

Deslandes, Bastien and Lemieux began four projects in 2001 (2001-2005) involving SFC collaboration with two elementary and two secondary schools. It is important to note that this action research was started in 2001, before the adoption of Bill 124 in December 2002. At that time, all school principals had not yet been required to develop a global and ecosystemic vision of the interventions carried out or to be carried out in the school. Now, we know that any SFC collaborative program must fit into the educational project and be part of the success plan so that it becomes a priority for the school. The objectives of the overall project were as follows: (1) to develop, implement and evaluate a SFC collaborative program; and (2) to identify models of SFC collaboration that are transferable to various settings. The components of the overall programs were intended to include activities from the six categories of activities in Epstein's typology. The intervention approach was based on the steps Epstein had outlined, and was consistent with those of action research. These steps are consistent with the recommendations of Epstein and colleagues (2002), which read as follows: (1) create an action group; (2) obtain formal support and funding; (3) identify starting points; (4) design an annual plan; and (5) evaluate implementation and results. The instruments used are based on a quantitative and a qualitative approach. To carry out the needs assessment study with a

view to identifying the starting points, i.e., the strengths and weaknesses of SFC collaboration, questionnaires used by Baril and Deslandes (2002) and adapted to the participating schools were administered to teachers, parents, and high school students. They addressed the activities offered, improvements to be made, attitudes, etc. Questionnaires were also used to evaluate the means put in place. To evaluate the implementation process after one year and after three years, semi-directed interviews were conducted with three or four members of each action group. To follow up with two primary schools (after 4 years), group interviews were also conducted with three members of the two action groups in June 2005. Annual Action Plan and Three-Year Action Plan grids (based on those of Epstein et al., 2002) were used. They can be easily adapted to the context of the years 2019-20 (see Deslandes et al., 2006a, Annexes pp. 51-85).

In the need's assessment study, the vast majority of parents responded that they feel that the school communicates sufficiently with them when their child is experiencing difficulties. However, they would like to have more communication when the child or teenager is doing well or improving. In one primary school, teachers then set up a system of monthly mini-diplomas awarded to three students in the same class who have met academic or behavioral challenges. During the evaluation of this activity, one father said: "I was proud of him, we will put up his diploma on the refrigerator so that he will remember this honor for a long time". One mother said, "I like to receive this kind of certificate, instead of receiving negative memos". Still in the same project, the second primary school decided to improve communication between the school and the families by giving parents their child's portfolio at the first report card meeting. The parents who participated in the evaluation of this activity almost unanimously stated that reading the portfolio allowed them to identify the child's strengths and weaknesses. "I could see exactly what she needed to improve", says a mother. Some schools have chosen to produce a regular information bulletin that informs families about school programs, school policies, and the recognition of student progress. Others distributed phone numbers and e-mail addresses to parents of the school, the principal and the teachers. In summary, following the needs assessment study, some activities were carried out in each school: reading and writing workshops with parents, interactive homework assignments, use of the portfolio to communicate with parents, workshops to support parents, pamphlets offered to parents on the services delivered in the school and in the community, diplomas offered to students after a successful completion of the program, a guide for parents containing homework tips, etc.. (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b; Deslandes et al., 2006a).

**Evaluation of the implementation process.** The verbatim analysis made it possible to identify the facilitating conditions and the challenges in the implementation of the SFC program. Here are a few elements that were deemed essential: integration of the collaborative program into the educational project and the success plan so that it becomes a priority; leadership of the principal and members of the action group; leadership of the members of the school council; leadership at the school district level; a liaison officer or coordinator having a stable and credible position; creation of a network of schools wishing to develop SFC collaboration; some training in SFC collaboration, symbolic incentives, monthly meetings; establishment of effective communication channels among school-team members (also between committees), parents, and the community; development of an annual plan and a three-year plan, and respect of the pace of change of each school. (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006c, 2007, 2008b).

**Impact of the school-family-community partnership program.** In the two primary schools, there was mobilization around the activities put in place. Evaluations of the activities with parents showed a very high level of satisfaction, a better appreciation of the work of the teachers and greater communication with their own children. The reading and writing workshops helped to equip parents so that they feel more competent in helping their child. At the secondary level, few activities were implemented. At the end of the third year, there was still mistrust, fear of interference, and discomfort with the evaluation process expressed by some members of the administration. Two models of SFC collaboration appear to have emerged: (1) an institutional and structural model that illustrates how the SFC collaborative program should be integrated into the school's priorities by becoming a concern of all stakeholders and being regularly evaluated, and (2) a model related to the overall implementation and evaluation process, which refers to the steps to be followed and that corresponds to the action-research model used (see the diagrams in Deslandes et al., 2006a, p. 31).

The data collected in our research highlight the importance of first developing trust between all stakeholders. However, we were disappointed by the slow pace in the development of collaboration, or perhaps our expectations were unrealistic. How can we explain this slow development of SFC collaboration? Apart from the recommendations made in our report (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008b; Deslandes et al., 2006a), plausible answers were found in Christenson and Sheridan's (2001) work. These authors deplore the fact that, too often, activities are developed without paying attention to the process variables that influence the quality of the ties between families and school. As mentioned earlier, these authors call for the adoption of a partnership process with four components: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions. In other words, before thinking about developing activities (actions), the table must be set, for example, by developing an approach that recognizes the importance of families and educators as agents of socialization for academic success, the attitudes that parents and educators have towards one another, and an atmosphere conducive to collaboration. These are prerequisites# for the development and implementation of collaborative actions or activities aimed at promoting the academic, social, emotional and behavioral skills of young people. After all, the partnership in question is essentially a matter of relationships (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008b; Deslandes et al., 2006a). Epstein (2019), for her part, is realistic in pointing out that partnership programs are improved through incremental progress, links to the curriculum reform, continuing professional development and technical assistance.

### Third Initiative

In the project led by Dumoulin, Thériault, Duval and Tremblay (2013), eight school teams were accompanied and supported, including four disadvantaged schools. A cohort of four schools was followed from 2006 to 2009 and a second one from 2009 to 2012. Each participating school set up an internal *School, Family and Community Partnership* (SFCP) committee comprising the principal, professional staff, teachers, a pedagogical advisor, a community member and parents. Organizations representing the community could include, for example, those responsible for municipal facilities (park, arena, library, etc.) and merchants. The research and intervention team consisted of three educational consultants, a professional from the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

(MELS) and two researchers from UQAC (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi). Financial support came from MELS, the school board, the Dropout Prevention Regional Council (Conseil régional de prévention de l'abandon scolaire) (CRÉPAS) and the participating schools. One of the objectives of the action-research was to create real, direct and constant exchanges with parents. It also aimed to involve them in decision-making in order to establish a relationship of trust between them and the school team.

Each school did an inventory of its SFC collaborative practices and surveyed parents about their needs. To conduct the inventory of practices, the researchers used the guide *Bringing Families and Elementary Schools Together* (MEQ, 2004), which was also based on Epstein's typology. Collaborative practices are classified according to the following components: (1) diversifying and facilitating communication; (2) facilitating the exercise of the parental role; (3) encouraging parental involvement in the school life; and (4) working more closely with the community to meet the needs of families and of youth.

With the help of the researchers, the data were compiled and analyzed. The research and intervention team was responsible for designing, planning, developing and implementing all training activities. The data was analyzed and the team produced a *School-Family-Community Collaboration Activity Directory*:

- Examples of welcoming activities are presented, followed by examples of communication that include the school's website, teachers' email addresses, the student portal, the school board calendar, the school newspaper, reply coupons and phone calls.
- As for what teachers do to support the role of parents, activities are offered by the schools, such as information meetings, homework assistance workshops, training workshops for K-4 parents, training workshops for preschool parents, family happy hour and workshops with specialists. The topics discussed are: (1) the early childhood-primary transition and the primary-secondary transition; (2) homework; (3) awareness to reading and writing; and (4) healthy lifestyle habits.
- For their part, the schools in the school district organize open houses on students' realizations, educational activities, museum visits, "family month", and reading activities.
- In terms of what teachers do to promote parents' presence at school, this can include family meals, grandparents' presence, Parent Participation Organization (PPO) and parent volunteering.
- What the schools of the school district and the community do to collaborate includes educational and environmental activities, reading done by grandparents, photos of the neighborhood in the school calendar, financial assistance from organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, or through walkathons to develop the schoolyard in their neighborhood, psychological assistance through confidential messages to which community workers respond; sports and cultural activities made possible by community members accompanying youngsters to the arena and library; or by fathers participating in the gym, etc. Although a number of these strategies are not new, as they have been identified in many previous documents, this *Guide* draws its originality and usefulness particularly in its effort to make an inventory and bring together in a single document as many examples that are simple to

implement and inspiring for other environments that wish to develop ways to foster SFC collaboration. This project, with its infrastructures and access to a large number of schools, is very promising. We will come back to it later.



## Promising Avenues

Several times in the works identified above, tensions have emerged in the relationships between parents and teachers, or between parents and youngsters, often caused by misunderstandings, clumsiness, and different points of view. If they are recurrent, these tensions can accumulate over time and become conflicts. How can these tensions and differences between schools and families be reduced? We have come to understand that school-family collaboration depends on the convergence of points of view and the roles and responsibilities that each one is willing to assume. It is in this perspective that Deslandes and Barma have undertaken research-interventions (see Deslandes & Barma, 2015, 2016, 2018a, b) that focus on teacher-parent relationships with the aim of promoting parental involvement in schooling.

This process is based on the third generation of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2001, 2010), and on two key concepts, contradictions and expansive learning in which the Change Laboratory method is anchored. Note that Dr. Barma (2008) is a well-known researcher in Quebec for her work in this specific field. CHAT uses a triangular representation of individual/social mediation that has six interconnected elements or poles: subjects, objects, tools, community, rules and division of labor (Engeström, 1987). In any system of human activity, the subject acting within a community is organized by rules and division of labor and uses artifacts or tools to accomplish, with others, the object of the collective activity. The Change Laboratory is the mode of intervention proposed or retained in the work of the team. In this method, the intervention research team and the actors work together to identify the problems encountered and to create new tools in order to solve a problematic situation. Based on the expansion learning cycle formulated by Engeström (1987), the Change Laboratory method comprises six categories of expansive learning actions: (1) questioning or state of the situation; (2) analysis of the situation at the cultural-historical and empirical levels; (3) modelling of the new solution; (4) testing of the solution; (5) implementation; and (6) reflection on processes (Barma, 2014; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Here are a few examples.

### First example of relevant intervention research

Based on CHAT and using the Change Laboratory (CL) method, Deslandes and Barma (2015) analyzed the first two sessions of a nine-participant CL in order to identify tensions between teachers and parents, according to the poles of the activity system. These tensions relate mainly to the willingness or unwillingness to promote greater parental involvement (object), sometimes ambiguous communication (tool), unrealistic expectations of some parents regarding the feedback expected from teachers (division of labor), ways of doing things that do not respect the school's functioning rules, the individualistic nature of some parents' relationships with teachers, and certain services offered by professionals only during school hours (community). This dialectical analysis conducted by the researchers made it possible to identify the problems encountered and to discuss them with the participants. This data can be reinvested as mirror data in a later phase in order to overcome these problems and engage in the co-modelling of a new form of relationship between teachers and parents (Deslandes & Barma, 2015).

## Second example

In another study, Deslandes, Barma and Morin (2015) identified areas of inner tensions and contradictions that emerge in parent-teacher relationships in order to guide them through individual and collective transformation processes. Based on the model proposed by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010), the researchers conducted interviews with primary and secondary teachers. The objectives were: (1) to identify teachers' perceptions of the factors and processes that interact in their relationships with parents in general; (2) to document the facilitating conditions and challenges they encounter in their relationships with parents in light of new instruments, rules or divisions of labor in their workplaces; and (3) to identify the necessary conditions that could lead to collective reflection on how to better communicate and collaborate.

The main findings are discussed in the light of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT; Engeström, 2015). These mainly include issues of trust vs. control when it comes to choosing communication tools and issues related to hierarchical status and power within and outside the school walls with regard to the redistribution of actions among members of the school community. In light of the analysis with CHAT, it emerges that school community members need to have a common understanding of what a collaborative relationship means for all. If parents see themselves as clients, the contradiction in the communication activity will not be resolved and teachers will continue to feel dissatisfied and isolated. In this study, there is a greater prevalence of lack of support from school principals. Participants' comments are consistent with research findings that show the importance of principals in helping teachers work with parents and facilitate the development of trusting relationships with them, as well as those that highlight the fact that some seem to have chosen to prioritize the principle of clientelism. In these circumstances, the principal's role as mediator becomes marginal and, under the pressure from some parents, the principal can hardly provide the support expected by teachers. In short, in this study, communication with parents seems to be essentially one-way and, for some teachers, it is not only a means of discussing student progress and difficulties, but also a way of protecting themselves in the event of recriminations. In light of CHAT, we see two opposing forces: trust and control.

The client approach was also discussed by the vast majority of participants in their relations with parents, in terms of the rules to be established. Parents who are "too present", "excessive demands", the "need for trust", are words that corroborate data from previous works indicating that teachers are uncomfortable with the greater power of parents from privileged backgrounds, who are generally better educated than other parents. It is not surprising, therefore, as participants indicated, that these parents bypass teachers and prefer to speak directly to the principal, which is a threatening approach in the eyes of teachers. In light of the CHAT-based analysis, we see contradictions in the division of labor: parents and teachers working in silos or choosing to work as a team? Another explanation is the individualistic perspective of parents at the expense of other students as a group in the same class. This individualistic view is reflected mostly in the client and in an overprotective parent who may be distrustful of the teacher. The application of the CL method is seen as a promising avenue for using mirror data to develop a new understanding of parent-teacher relationships and a new vision of its future development. Some elements that could become starting points for dialogue within the

CL sessions are discussed. This culture of clientelism seems to empower parents more than in the past and it opens the door to greater expectations and demands from society as a whole. It is fertile ground for excessive demands and distrust in teacher-parent relationships, amplified by performance demands and the challenges associated with diverse family structures and situations. It is no longer just a dichotomy between advantaged and disadvantaged families. It is rather about conditions that involve several risk factors interacting with each other and with processes. Once again, it is illusory to think that we will overcome or eliminate any possible dilemma between teachers and parents. There will always be different types of parents who pose additional challenges for teachers (Smit & Driessen, 2009).

### Third example

The researchers analyzed the written comments of parents in a previous study conducted in 2005 on two processes, the exercise of the role of the parent educator and the school-family relationships associated with academic success in high school. The objectives were to describe parents' understanding of their role in the education and schooling of adolescents; to document their perceptions of invitations to participate on the part of adolescents and teachers; and to identify contradictions in their relationships with adolescents and teachers. Drawing on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Deslandes and Barma (2016) analyzed qualitative data obtained from the written comments of 409 parents. These analyses show a first level of contradictions in the rules and division of labor of the activity systems. For example, on the one hand, parents have to be involved at home, while on the other hand, they are confronted with the non-receptiveness of some adolescents (rules). Moreover, some parents want to help adolescents develop a sense of responsibility, while others expect adolescents to be completely autonomous (division of labor). Unclear rules and the division of roles and responsibilities between adolescents and parents can contribute to the accumulation of tensions and possible conflicts between them.

In relation to school-family relations, there are also tensions between expected parental involvement in school activities versus lack of parental availability (rules), as well as between parents' requests for useful and positive communication with the school (tools) and parents' perception of receiving communication messages from teachers only when the adolescent has academic or behavioral difficulties (division of labor). This is particularly reflected in the excerpts revealing parental dissatisfaction with their relationship with teachers and the school. As a promising avenue for intervention and developmental research, the authors suggest applying the CHAT-based CL method to give adolescents a voice and act as mediators in both activity systems (Deslandes & Barma, 2016).

### Fourth example

The context of learning assessment provides fertile ground for recurrent recriminations by some parents, increasing the challenges of collaborative school-family relationships. In the present approach, Deslandes and Barma (2018a) review previous, but still relevant, studies on this issue, using the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and two key concepts, contradictions and

expansive learning, in which the CL method is rooted. It is through questioning and criticism of previous interpretations and subsequent activities that the researchers hoped to cross the boundaries between the activity system of parents and teachers and propose a new model of activity system. The purpose of this change in trajectory is to identify more effective ways for parents and teachers to work together in assessing student learning.

The first study (2007-2008) using quantitative data (web-based questionnaires) aimed to identify parents' views on their needs in terms of assessment of learning (Deslandes, Rivard, Joyal, Trudeau & Laurencelle, 2009). The second study (2008-2009) used a qualitative approach (focus groups) to obtain educators' perceptions of parents' needs (Deslandes & Rivard, 2011a). A third (2009-2010) helped to develop information sheets for parents (Deslandes & Rivard, 2011b) and a fourth one (2010-2011) used an experiential learning approach to conduct workshops with parents (Deslandes & Rivard, 2013).

In the light of CHAT, primary (at each pole of the activity system) and secondary (between the poles) contradictions are observed in the parents' activity system (parents' perspectives). Although there is a consensus on the objective of improving parent-teacher collaboration for better academic success (outcome), there seems to be an opposition between parents' willingness to participate in monitoring their child's progress (*rule*) and their lack of understanding of report cards and evaluation sheets (*tools*). Similarly, parents request more information on grades and classroom observations (*rules*) as opposed to low participation in discussion groups (*division of labor*). Parents want to understand assessment practices vs. the inaccessibility of materials that are easy to understand (*tools*). Similarly, some parents want to know more about the grades and classroom observations used in assessments, as opposed to parents claiming that teachers have the expertise in assessing learning (*division of labor*). In the teacher activity system (teacher perspective), contradictions also appear in the *rules*, *tools*, and *division of labor*. Teachers use hermetic terminology in their invitation letters, as opposed to the use of neutral terms (*tool*). On the one hand, teachers expect parents to understand assessment practices and, on the other hand, they question their interest, availability and willingness to obtain training (*rules*). Similarly, teachers expect parents to be involved in the supervision of their children's school work, while some assume that parents have an overall view of the learning process that goes beyond what is normally expected (*division of labor*). According to the *Expansive Learning Theory*, parents and teachers need to develop a shared vision of the nature of collaboration (purpose) in the context of assessing learning. The CL methodology as an activity production tool is suggested. Crossing the boundaries of their respective activity systems, teachers and parents will be invited to share resources for the benefit of better parent-teacher collaboration (Deslandes & Barma, 2018a).

## Experimentation of an intervention research

The controversy over homework resurfaces periodically in public forums. It is in a context of controversy about the relevance and utility of homework that various studies on this issue are situated. Here, we will present only the findings of our own studies prior to this intervention. In the first study, even though most parents were in favor of homework, the results showed that some

families, including those whose children were having difficulties at school, were more reluctant about homework. These same families were less likely to perceive the utility of homework than others. Families with low schooling and families with children having learning difficulties felt less competent to adequately intervene in homework (Deslandes et al., 2008).

In a second study, results indicated that parental involvement decreased from Grade 4 to Grade 6, which was not surprising, as parents expected children to take responsibility for homework themselves. (Deslandes, 2009a).

A third study was conducted on the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding homework. The majority of teachers seemed to take for granted the need to assign homework because it complements what is learned in the classroom. Teachers consider that they offer substantial help to students with learning difficulties by increasing their availability and adapting materials. In their view, homework allows parents to see what their child is doing and what difficulties he/she is experiencing. They believe that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that homework is completed, to promote the development of their children's autonomy, to give priority to homework over extracurricular activities and, above all, to avoid playing the role of a teacher at the risk of confusing the child. Most of them stated that they were aware of their students' family conditions and that homework was a way to communicate with parents (Deslandes, 2009b).

In a fourth study, Deslandes and Rousseau (2007) looked at the concordance between teachers' and parents' role construction and their expectations regarding accompaniment in homework. The findings suggest that parents who have a positive attitude towards homework perceive their role as more important than other parents. Parents of children with learning difficulties felt less responsible for verifying the completion of homework and understanding the tasks that the child needs to accomplish. Compared to parents with more education, parents with less education felt more that teachers should take family conditions into consideration when assigning homework. Teachers, compared to parents, appear to have higher expectations towards parents, particularly with respect to the importance of providing physical and psychological structure, supervision, encouragement, direct help, etc. Finally, in a fifth study, parents consider it of utmost importance to have information on strategies to support learning and homework at home at the first group meeting of the school year (Bergeron & Deslandes, 2011).

As the above studies show, many factors contribute to the complexity of the homework issue, such as student and family characteristics, grade level and parents' and teachers' beliefs, their strategies, their role construction, and their mutual expectations. Despite the increase in knowledge about homework, the topic remains controversial. Deslandes and Barma (2018b) were therefore invited to accompany a school team (teachers and parents of primary school students) in a collective reflection on this topic. The two addressed research questions were as follows: (1) Is there a common vision of the problem among the participants? and (2) What are the possible actions that have been or could be taken? The researchers conducted an analysis of the discourse recorded during two meetings in order to highlight ways in which teachers and parents can take action to get to know each other better and better understand each other's realities in a process of change in the area of homework.

The dialogue was coded according to Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo's, (2014) six types of transformative expressions: resistance, criticism, explanation, vision, engagement in concrete actions, and taking action. These expressions, which were more frequent in terms of explanation and then criticism involving change, were mostly associated with the following poles of the activity triangle: *rules*, *division of labor* and *tools*. The research-intervention was based on CHAT and used the CL method (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). This methodology is based on the concept of *expansive learning* (Engeström, 2015) and suggests that participants reach a consensus on the nature of the problem and model new solutions together.

During the first CL session, the teachers and the principal described their current practices and expectations for accompanying parents with homework. Their concerns were consistent with the findings of our previous works, which were presented at the beginning of the session in the form of mirror data to stimulate a collective vision of the homework issue, promote problem solving and improve parent-teacher collaboration. At the second CL session, teachers from the first CL meeting volunteered to participate and a few parents representing different types of families (non-traditional and large families, and families with children having learning difficulties) were invited. The idea of inviting parents could be seen as a turning point in the process. Overall, the participants were pragmatic and realistic about the envisioned improvements, suggesting a uniformity in the terms used to designate homework, the possibility of holding a third group meeting with parents and creating (one-minute) capsules on how to accompany their child in completing homework, making them available on the school's website, and making a number of home visits to better equip parents who really needed help (Deslandes & Barma, 2018b).

At the same time, the analysis of the discursive expressions brought to light a fundamental inner contradiction related to the *object* itself: the collaboration between teachers and parents in the context of homework. Is it really necessary to transform the type of collaboration in this context? Or is it not simply a question of practical adjustments and clarification of the guidelines addressed to parents regarding their involvement, adapted to their child's class and respecting the conditions aimed at developing their autonomy and sense of responsibility? Clearly, there is a need to harmonize homework policies, including timetables and deadlines, across school levels and to adopt a common terminology regarding homework. There is no doubt that the result of this study is the most significant contribution to the homework debate (Deslandes & Barma, 2018b).



## Conclusions and Avenues for Reflection

At the end of this quick retrospective and with a certain hindsight, we can see that progress has been made in Quebec in the area of school-family collaboration, but perhaps not as much, perhaps not as quickly as was initially hoped, hence the importance of moving forward, of continuing along the same path. In this document, it has been necessary to recall the definition of some concepts as they were introduced nearly two decades ago. Indeed, several terms are used in both French and English, either intuitively or as synonyms. There has been a certain evolution, as is the case now, with regard to the term school-family collaboration. In fact, it is increasingly common to use the term collaborative school-family relationships. And with good reason, because over the years we have come to understand that the collaboration or partnership we are talking about is essentially about relationships. From this come attitudes and even essential life skills. This is what has led us to also take a close look at the interpersonal relationships between parent-youth and parent-teacher. At this point, given the emergencies that seem to threaten equality of opportunity in education, such as a recent fundraising campaign in favor of a private school when several public schools are experiencing great difficulties, we propose to move forward and debate the accuracy of each other's point of view at a later date.

A brief description of a few theoretical models was preferred to a list of models without content. These models are complementary and one may be more relevant than another, depending on the purpose of the reading and analysis. A model is the representation of the moment of explanation of a phenomenon. A model schematizes concepts and illustrates the relationships and oppositions between the different elements. A model can evolve over time as new elements are taken into account. We have associated some of the criticisms noted in the literature with a lack of knowledge and understanding of these models. It would be futile to engage in debates with a view to discriminating against certain models instead of seeking to develop and improve them.

Family processes were examined in terms of the role of the parent educator and school-family relationships. In short, the studies show unequivocally the positive impact of some parental behaviors on educational success, such as encouragement, sincere praise, availability and openness to exchanges, and direct and punctual help with school work, regardless of the family's socioeconomic status and the youngsters' level of education. These practices as well as the dimensions of parenting style were looked at according to the gender of the parent and of the adolescent, in the context of homework, according to the students' academic trajectory, and according to the family structure and the interest of adolescents in favoring parental involvement. Special attention should continue to be paid to the involvement of fathers in the education of youth, although improvements have been observed, especially in early childhood. As well, research is needed on parental involvement within new types of families (e.g., same-sex parents). There is also a need to consider awareness-raising activities with teens, their parents and teachers about the importance of families continuing to be appropriately involved at the high school level. Adolescents need parental involvement, whether they mean it or not. For their part, teachers can help students understand their role in, among other things, school-family communication (providing memos or report cards, translating notices) and in establishing new communications (exchanging with family members about working at home; using



e-mail, the school website, the parent portal, or social media platforms to access information about school programs and activities and about upcoming conferences between parents, teachers, and students). However, Epstein (2019) reminds us that resilient young people will succeed without parental involvement. Teachers, family members or significant adults can take over to guide and encourage them. But when they have the support of family, school and community, these youngsters tend to feel safer and more cared for, develop positive attitudes and behaviors, and reach their full potential and persevere in school.

The study of contextual characteristics seems to have reached a certain level of maturity over the years. A plethora of papers and literature reviews have identified characteristics that influence the level of parental involvement, including parental and family characteristics (education, family structure, ethnicity), children's characteristics (age, academic performance, responsiveness or openness to family influence), and teacher and school characteristics and practices (values, professional training). The diversity of children and their families is one of the most important contemporary challenges facing educators in the education community. However, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which parental involvement in schools varies according to school size or urban/rural setting. As well, a great body of research has focused on the influence of social cognitions such as representations, expectations, perceptions and beliefs of parents and teachers. From those works, there appears a pressing need to develop a common vision, a shared vision of a given situation, of each other's needs and of the actions to be taken.

Relationships between the school and families refer to links, which can take the form, for example, of communication with teachers, parent-teacher meetings, help in the classroom and school, and participation in committees, activities, and social events at school or on outings. Communication remains the cornerstone of collaborative school-family relationships. In fact, the above examples correspond to the types of parental involvement in Epstein's typology. The associated benefits for students, parents, and teachers are well documented. Furthermore, Epstein (2019) argues that it is wrong to think that any activity involving families will increase students' standardized test scores in the short term. Studies show that some outcomes related to improved attendance and behavior may be observed in the short term, but others, such as those related to academic performance, may take longer. It is a misconception that parents will participate in large numbers in school committees, or that many will draw on resources in the community, or that they will act as volunteers on an ongoing basis. It's all about right dosage, equilibrium, and common sense, all of which manifest themselves in good family-work-school balance (Deslandes, 2011b). Moreover, even well-planned and well-implemented activities are not useful to all students and their families (Epstein, 2019).

With respect to the role of the school and educators, it is well known that school practices influence family practices. Research conducted over almost 25 years shows that school practices and strategies to involve families make a difference in whether, who and how families decide to participate. Single-parent families, parents who work outside the home, parents who live far from school, fathers versus mothers, parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and those who do not have easy access to new technologies are less involved. To compensate for this, educators need to ensure that

families can be involved at different times of the day and week and in different places to support the school and their children (Epstein, 2019).

In terms of training teachers in collaborative school-family relationships, several steps have been taken in the last 15 years: needs assessment, development, implementation of mandatory courses, and program evaluation. However, it appears that some universities have not yet followed the way. Nonetheless, improvements can be expected. The most important thing is not to throw away what is already being done in some universities, but rather to add a stronger component on the diversity of youth and their families and another on collaboration, as Deslandes (2019b) recommended in the document entitled *School-Community Relations* (Volume 2). There is a need to think about a better link between this training and teaching internships, so that students can put into practice the knowledge, skills and attitudes they have learned. It would be quite relevant to also add such training, which would be more interdisciplinary.

It is in the area of evaluation of SFC partnership programs that there is a pressing need to invest effort and make progress. The steps in the intervention approach proposed by Epstein in the context of a comprehensive SFC partnership program and those proposed for the evaluation of such a program have been presented on numerous occasions. Epstein (2019) reiterates the importance of including activities from the six types in her typology, although it is clear that not all of them will be useful to all families. The implementation of a comprehensive program is a gradual process, not an event; it is a matter of shared responsibility and caring, based on a set of life skills. Epstein (2019) points out that not all of the implemented activities will succeed at first glance in encouraging family involvement, but if they are well planned and linked to specific objectives (educational project and school success plan), the annual evaluation that will follow will make it possible to identify elements likely to improve them. It should be noted that collaborative work between schools and school districts will also contribute to this. Partnership programs are different from one school to another, since each school is unique. Schools must adapt their practices to the goals of their institution, the needs and interests of families, and the age and grade level of their students. Evaluation therefore involves assessing the quality and success of each activity after its implementation and evaluating the quality of the program as a whole at the end of each school year. Evaluation procedures can vary from the simplest to the most complex (Epstein et al., 2019). All in all, evaluation remains a thorny issue with its share of challenges, but it is a necessary process

In terms of SFC collaborative initiatives, three examples representing different stages of development were presented. The first, which focuses on the needs of students and their families in the context of a high school, contributed to the validation of measuring instruments developed by Epstein and her team and still in use in 2019. The second, also based on Epstein's intervention approach and typology, made it possible to measure the means put in place as well as the implementation process of a SFC partnership program. In the two primary schools, the study of the project's impact revealed actions leading to change and adherence to the evaluation process. At the secondary level, there was an awareness of the actors, but the follow-up was hampered by mistrust, by the implementation of means focused solely on information, and by discomfort with the evaluation process. Elements of response to this resistance, to this slowness to develop, were found in the four

components of the partnership process: approach, attitudes, atmosphere and actions, and interpersonal skills, which correspond to prerequisites for the development and implementation of actions or collaborative activities aimed at promoting the academic, social, emotional and behavioral skills of youngsters. At the same time, research shows that, at the secondary level, parental involvement tends to decrease unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement SFC partnership practices appropriate for each level. It is therefore important to encourage secondary schools to develop SFC partnership programs, specific to each cycle, if desired.

The third initiative is part of the activities carried out within a regional education research consortium in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Côte-Nord and Charlevoix regions. Each participating school was asked to make an inventory of its collaborative practices, which were then compiled in a guide. This initiative included the elements considered essential by Epstein: an internal School, Family and Community Partnership (SFCP) committee comprising the principal, professional staff, teachers, a pedagogical advisor, a member of the community and parents, and a research and intervention team made up of pedagogical advisors, a professional from MELS, and two researchers from UQAC, the local university. Financial support was available. All in all, this program appears to be a viable and promising initiative with the essential ingredients for success. The promoters of this initiative (top-down) along with all the players involved (bottom-up) are strongly encouraged to continue along the same path and to develop comprehensive programs in terms of SFC partnerships.

Again and again, the works identified and the studies reported previously have revealed tensions in the relationships between the actors, often caused by misunderstandings and different visions, even in the more advantaged circles. These tensions can become conflicts, if not identified and resolved. Yet school-family collaboration depends on the convergence of points of view and the roles and responsibilities that each one is willing to assume. To reduce these tensions, research-interventions have been proposed to promote parental involvement in schooling and improve SFC relationships. These processes are based on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and the Change Laboratory method. Using as mirror data the results of previous Quebec studies, examples of research-interventions were presented with regard to parent-youth and parent-teacher relationships in their daily lives and in the context of learning assessments and homework and evaluations. Other research-interventions are currently under way and all of them point to possible solutions aimed at making radical changes or pragmatic improvements to a given problem.

As Deslandes (2006 a, b, c) mentioned earlier, SFC collaboration relies on a set of life skills that, when absent, makes the benefits of any initially well-intentioned activity very short-lived. Epstein's model seemed quite promising and still holds promise, provided that it meets the essential ingredients described by the author and discussed at length over the years. However, it is not enough just to think about activities. For them to be beneficial, there must be a set of facilitating conditions related to attitudes, approach and atmosphere. Above all, everyone must believe in them.

The many resources available on the CTREQ website (Coeuréaction) for all those involved in school-family partnerships should not be overlooked. In addition, there are also subsequent projects (e.g., Stratégie d'intervention Agir Autrement SIAA and others) that may prove to be inspiring. Many

of the recommendations expressed above corroborate those made by Deslandes and Bertrand in 2001, while allowing us to take further steps. Progress has clearly been made, but as Maulini (1997) so aptly puts it, the school-family partnership is an ongoing process.

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